

A painting depicting a scene from the Bible. On the right, a man in a dark, heavy robe is seen from behind, looking out over a vast, arid landscape. On the left, a large, rounded object, possibly a stone or a large pot, is visible. The background is a hazy, light blue sky. The overall style is impressionistic, with visible brushstrokes and a warm, earthy color palette.

**Christ
and
Abraham**

The cover is taken from a painting by Janet Brooks Gerloff (Janet Brooks-Gerloff , born April 20, 1947 in Kansas , USA; died September 22, 2008 in Kornelimünster near Aachen, Germany). She studied at the University of Northern Colorado , where she graduated as an art teacher.

During her training from 1967 to 1972 she received artistic inputs from Joe Hutchinson, Texas and from Pawel Kontny, Denver and from 1972 to 1976 from Oskar Koller, Nuremberg. In 1972 she moved to Germany, where she married the doctor Joachim Gerloff in the same year. She has two children: Anneke and Hendrik. Until 2003 she lived and worked in her studio in Aachen-Brand. In the same year she moved into a new studio in the New Benedictine Abbey in Kornelimünster, Aachen, and moved into a second studio in Weimar. From 2005 the artist set up her studio in a listed half-timbered house in the historic center of Kornelimünster. She lived and worked here until her death in September 2008. She found her final resting place in the Kornelimünster mountain cemetery.

The dominant theme in Janet Brooks Gerloff's work is people in conflict and upheaval.

Dedication

This volume looks in detail at Abraham's life, from the beginning, in Ur of the Chaldees, to his departure at Machpelah. What struck me about his life was that he knew Jesus. This sounds strange, seeing that they are separated in time by about 2 Millennia, but Jesus said that He knew Abraham, ***Joh 8:56 Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. Joh 8:57 Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Joh 8:58 Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.***

To those who sat through these studies, thank you for your encouragement to me and I hope you too have been encouraged.

Thanks to my amanuensis Shelley for her continual encouragement to get this book published and her gracious correction, suggestions and support to me.

My gratitude goes also to my wife Diana who has encouraged my recovery and been a source of strength, inspiration and love. She has always been there for me, physically and spiritually, on my path back.

Love in Jesus,

Mike 7th December 2021

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Where a Bible version is not stated it is the Authorised Version, otherwise:

- CEV Contemporary English Version
- Darby John Nelson Darby Translation
- ERV Easy to Read Version
- Geneva 1587 Version
- GNB Good News Translation
- GW God's Word
- ISV International Standard Version
- KJV Kings James Version
- LEB Lexham English Version
- LITV Literal Translation of the Holy Bible
- LXX Septuagint
- RSV Revised Standard Version
- YLT Young's Literal Translation

Scripture quotations are in *italic script*. All versions can be found in e-Sword.

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1. Abram/Abraham

I have tried to be as consistent as possible in using the names Abram and Abraham. *1Ch 1:27 Abram; the same is Abraham.* But Abram strictly refers to the man up to the age of 99 years, when God gives him a new name, Abraham, *Gen 17:5 Neither shall thy name any more be called **Abram**, but thy name shall be **Abraham**; for a father of many nations have I made thee.* In the NT scriptures it refers to both Abram and Abraham as Abraham!

We have covered the rise of the Babel Generation in the former volume, “Babylon”, but there is something to note. Between Genesis chapter 11 and Genesis chapter 12, there is an intervening period of at least 2,000 years, when the stage is readied for the next part of our revelation. 2,000 years forward from Abraham will come the time of the Messiah, when the Gospel will go out into this World, the World that started at Babel. With it will go the lessons that are learned firstly from Abraham and then from his generations. We shall also see the rise of the Messiah as the Seed of Abraham.

In time mankind would develop their religions, searching after God, but not finding Him. *Act 17:23 For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. Act 17:24 God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Act 17:25 Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; Act 17:26 And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; Act 17:27 That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: Act 17:28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.*

It was not until Enosh that men began to call upon the Lord. It took man 235 years of existence before the need came to be seen. But it was only a few and those were born before the flood of Noah. After the Flood and the scattering of man, there was still no written account as to how to serve God, but there were, we assume, certain men who kept the faith, men like the priest/king of Jebus, Melchizedek. Yet he had not been chosen to be the father of Nations, nor had his descendents been chosen to become a Covenant nation, the bearer of the “Seed”, which is Christ, but he was a type of Christ.

Ignorance is no excuse, but it would take a revelation, either directly or through men of God, to bring a change, from darkness to light, but that was in the distant future. In Sumer, they continued to worship false gods and deal with the problems of everyday life, feeding hungry families, providing a roof over their heads, marrying and giving in marriage, living and dying. It was in this place that a light would shine, many generations in the future, but it was a light that would grow dim with time.

What is Abram’s background? *Gen 11:27 And these are the generations of Terah: Terah begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begot Lot. Gen 11:28 And Haran died before the face of his father Terah in the land of his nativity at Ur of the Chaldeans. Gen 11:29 And Abram and Nahor took wives: the name of Abram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, a daughter of*

Haran, the father of Milcah and the father of Iscah. Gen 11:30 And Sarai was barren: she had no child. Gen 11:31 And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth together out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to go into the land of Canaan, and came as far as Haran, and dwelt there. Gen 11:32 And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years; and Terah died in Haran.

Abram is a migrant. *Deu 26:5 And thou shalt speak and say before Jehovah thy God, A perishing Aramaean was my father, and he went down to Egypt with a few, and sojourned there, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous. Deu 26:6 And the Egyptians evil-entreated us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage; Darby.*

That privilege of heading up a nation was given to Abram. *Jas 2:23 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the **Friend of God**.* Before Abram became a 'Friend of God' we see him lounging in sin. *Jos 24:2 And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods.*

He is found in Ur of the Chalda's, in Mesopotamia, an idol worshipper from a long line of idol worshippers. He moves to Haran as the whole family relocates. Why?

It may have had something to do with the weather or climate, as this was changing the world around him. The Harappan society of the Indus valley collapsed at this time, as the monsoons failed, and the Sahara was becoming desertified. The Divine warning to depart was not a moment too soon.

I find it strange that Abram should be given a call, out of the blue, and blindly follow it. It could have been evil calling to him. I do not

think this is the first time God appeared to Abram or indeed mankind. I do not think men come to an instant knowledge of God and although the disciples appear to have gone after Christ, in the end they needed more than a push to go with Him. I think Abram, like most of us, was on a learning curve and it led up to his call to depart. It was I imagine like Samuel's call:

1Sa 3:3 And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep; 1Sa 3:4 That the LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here am I. 1Sa 3:5 And he ran unto Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou calledst me. And he said, I called not; lie



Figure 1 Abram's birthplace

*down again. And he went and lay down. 1Sa 3:6 And the LORD called yet again, Samuel. And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And he answered, I called not, my son; lie down again. 1Sa 3:7 Now **Samuel did not yet know the LORD, neither was the word of the LORD yet revealed unto him.***

Would he have believed where God would take him, and would he have been surprised about the three major religions that espoused him, Judaism, Islam and Christianity or would he have been disappointed?

It is now some two millennia since the Flood and a long time has passed since the people were scattered at Babel, almost the same time as from Adam to Noah. I have come to question the Masoretic text and whether it can provide accurate dates of the ancient world. Its post Christian world view, is to place Moses and not Christ as the head of the faith, and its writings, a thousand years after Christ are not with a view to advancing Christianity. It is a post-Christian Jewish version of Scripture.

The Septuagint is a far more accurate version, if Jesus and Paul's quotes from this version are anything to go by. The genealogies of the Old Testament have not included every one either. *Luk 3:35 Which was the son of Saruch, which was the son of Ragau, which was the son of Phalec, which was the son of Heber, which was the son of Sala, Luk 3:36 Which was the son of **Cainan**, which was the son of Arphaxad, which was the son of Sem, which was the son of Noe, which was the son of Lamech*, Where as Cainan is in the New Testament he is omitted from the Old.

Matthew writes that "from David to the deportation to Babylon" there were "fourteen generations". *Mat 1:17 So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations.* Yet First Chronicles lists seventeen generations between David and the deportation (1 Chron 3:10–15). Was Matthew wrong? There is a reason which I will leave you to ponder.

Our purpose is not textual criticism, but to say it was a slightly longer time from the Flood to Abram, of the order of a thousand years, not 10's of thousands.

It is also interesting that Abram is not a vigorous young man when God comes to him. Like Moses who was 80 years old at the Exodus, he is an old man of 75 years. God sometimes uses an old man, when the passions of thoughtlessness and youth have run their course. As Paul says, regarding elders, *1Ti 3:6 Not one newly taken into the church, for fear that, through his high opinion of himself, he may come into the same sin as the Evil One.* BBE.

The Lord watched him, through his misspent youth, through his idolatry, through his ignorance until the time was ripe for the calling. I imagine he was continuing in his idolatry, rather as Paul on the Damascus road, when a light broke through. In the midst of idolatry, perhaps the vain worship of the idol, he is brought to a halt. "Abraham, Abraham" the voice calls, as it was later to call "Saul, Saul". *Act 9:5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*

You may not think that Abram, at that time, persecuted the Lord, but his idolatry was persecution. *1Sa 15:23 For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king.* Abram needed taking in hand. He had no thought for the Lord, he had no godly relatives, no one to question him, no one in the past that he could really look up to and Noah was a distant memory. He was a pioneer of the faith and breaking new ground. We must guard against holding his failures up to the New Testament light and judging him by that covenant. It was going to be all new to him and as a saint has said, “he was building the ship of faith as he went along”.

From Ur in the south he moved northwards to Haran with his father and lived there until his father died. The move from his land of nativity, Ur, was prompted by his father, perhaps for the reasons stated. The move from Haran down the other side of the Fertile Crescent was prompted by God. When the time came, he left most of his relatives behind and set out to see his new Kingdom.

Gen 12:1 Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: Gen 12:2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: Gen 12:3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. Gen 12:4 So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. Gen 12:5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came. Gen 12:6 And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. Gen 12:7 And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him. Gen 12:8 And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD. Gen 12:9 And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south.

I presume that Abram came down the Huleh Valley, past Hazor, down to the Sea of Galilee, across the plains of Jezreel to Shechem. He passed through the very land his illustrious ancestor, Jesus, would bring the Good News to. His “seed” would be a memorial to him. He passed through a land that would be torn and fought over countless times, past the sites of triumph and failure of his descendents. *Heb 11:32 And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Heb 11:33 Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Heb 11:34 Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight*



Figure 2 The migration route (?)

the armies of the aliens. Heb 11:35 Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection:

I wonder if Abram had a feeling of déjà vu when he walked through that land for the first time. It says of him that he went out by faith. *Heb 11:8 By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, **not knowing whither he went.** Heb 11:9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: Heb 11:10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*

Faith is having the eyes for the spirit world. It is doing what God says and trusting Him for the outcome. He does not know “with he went” but he does go to specific places on a specific route. He goes south not north, so he had an idea of the general direction but not a clear understanding of what God was doing.

Another version puts it: *Heb 11:8 Having been called out by faith, Abraham obeyed to go forth to a place which he was going to receive for an inheritance; and he went out **not understanding** where he went.* LITV. Not knowing and not understanding are I think, two different terms. The Greek word is ἐπίσταμαι = epistamai (put the mind upon, that is, comprehend, or be acquainted with: know, understand). It is used by Peter in his plea of ignorance about Christ. *Mar 14:68 But he denied, saying, I know not, neither **understand** I what thou sayest. And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew.*

I think that Abram “knew” where or whereabouts he was going but that he did not understand how the journey fitted in to his life. I believe he knew that he take a route to Bethel/Ai and that once there he should make an altar. *Gen 12:8 And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD. Gen 12:9 And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south.* Before this, he made an altar at Sichem, the place of Abram’s first altar and Christ’s first mission (John 4), also of Jacob’s altar (Gen 33:18).

The land was important, after all, God could have separated him from family and moved him a few miles down the road, but he did not and he promised him a land. *Gen 12:2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: Gen 12:3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*

It was through this man Abram that the World was going to be blessed. Perhaps he should start taking care of himself, lest this Divine word should not come to fulfilment. I imagine it began to play on his mind as he thought of it. It was a singular blessing that he had received but why at his age?



Figure 3 Abram's journeys

2. Sarai/Sarah

We see that Abram did not journey alone and that one of his companions was Sarai, who was ten years younger than Abram. *Gen 17:17 Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?* So at this point in the story Abram is 75 years old and Sarai 65 years old, and by the accounts given she was still a beautiful woman. The name means “my Princess”.

Her beauty came from within. *1Pe 3:1 Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; 1Pe 3:2 While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. 1Pe 3:3 Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; 1Pe 3:4 But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, **which is in the sight of God of great price.** 1Pe 3:5 For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: 1Pe 3:6 **Even as Sara obeyed Abraham**, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement. 1Pe 3:7 Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.*

That is the source of all beauty for the outward perishes. The ephemeral beauty of youth when it gets to the fading stage, becomes caked in makeup and hair dye, that is a caricature of what God intended. Youth is also shallow and apart from this ephemeral beauty there is little of character.

Youth also seeks approval from its peers and so does the aging beauty. But look though at the godly woman (and man too), where the value of character is seen in God’s sight. *1Pe 3:4**which is in the sight of God of great price*** not man’s. If we spent more time seeing ourselves as God knows us to be rather than playing to men, we would have much more fulfilling lives.

Also we see that Sarai was Abram’s sister. *Gen 20:12 And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife.*

We observe a number of points about this. Firstly, we are hypocrites to judge her by the laws of later times. *Lev 18:9 Never have sexual intercourse with your stepsister, whether she is your father's daughter or your mother's daughter. It makes no difference whether or not she was born in your house. Lev 18:10 Never have sexual intercourse with your granddaughter, whether she is your son's daughter or your daughter's daughter, because she is related to you. Lev 18:11 Never have sexual intercourse with a daughter of your father and his wife. She is your own sister. GW.*

We can interpret the event through one of two lenses, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (the law) or the Tree of Life (Christ). There are those Christians who are always looking to find a fault in others, and the greater the person, the better they feel in condemning them. By this, they appoint for themselves, a higher place at the feast. But they are hypocrites, whitened sepulchres, full of dead men’s bones. They are governed by evil thoughts, always trying to burden men, never finding grace, and stopping others from finding it. To these people the law is above everything and all must bow down to the law of Moses, irrespective of whether it had been given (Abram was 400 years before

Moses) or whether it had been superseded by Christ. These people are a disgrace and do not see their own sin.

If we interpret it in Christ we shall see a richer picture. Secondly, they show us that the law is mutable, and therefore it is not absolute.

Sarai is also a type of the Church to Abram's type of Christ. She is the sister, a close relative, she is the bride, she is the lover, and she is the church. I am reminded of the Song of Songs. The Shepherd calls the Shullamite "my sister, my betrothed". Christ shines through in another type of the Church and the good Shepherd, the Bride and Christ.

"The church may be called Christ's sister, because of his incarnation, in virtue of which he is not ashamed to call his people his brethren, and so his sisters. and on account of their adoption; in which respect, he that is Christ's Father is theirs; and which is evidenced in regeneration; when they, through grace, do the will of his Father, and so are his brother, and sister, and mother." Dr Gill.

We should not forget that God's promise to Abram, was dependent on a wife, *Gen 12:2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: Gen 12:3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*

We tend to rule Sarai as lesser part of the plan, an extra in the play of Abram's life, but she is a major player, such that without her there would be no Jewish race. We might forget that Abram had other children. He had Ishmael by Hagar his concubine. He had other son's through Keturah. *Gen 25:1 Then again Abraham took a wife, and her name was Keturah. Gen 25:2 And she bare him Zimran, and Jokshan, and Medan, and Midian, and Ishbak, and Shuah. Gen 25:3 And Jokshan begat Sheba, and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim, and Letushim, and Leummim. Gen 25:4 And the sons of Midian; Ephah, and Epher, and Hanoah, and Abida, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah. Gen 25:5 And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac. **Gen 25:6 But unto the sons of the concubines, which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, unto the east country.***

Abram saw the son Isaac as special, and this was **the only begotten** son of Sarai.

She was inspired by the same faith as Abram. *Rom 9:9 For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sara shall have a son.....Heb 11:11 Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised..... Rom 4:19 And being not weak in faith, **he considered not his own body now dead**, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet **the deadness of Sara's womb**: Abram was as dead as Sarai, reproductively.*

Yet there had been a lot of time before this event where she had begun to question the sense in even thinking about a child. *Gen 18:12 Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?*

We tend to forget that these people had real lives and that those lives did not consist in a series of texts with nothing in between. Sarai had grown up in Ur, not knowing the One True God. As she matured she was married to her half “brother” Abram and her thoughts turned to children, perhaps the heir for Abram. She would ask her god to bless her and give her fruitfulness. Who was this god?

Nanna (also known as Nannar, Nanna-Suen, Sin, Asimbabbar, Namrasit, Inbu) is the Mesopotamian god of the moon and wisdom. He is one of the oldest gods in the Mesopotamian pantheon and is first mentioned at the very dawn of writing in the region c. 3500 B.C. His cult centre was the great temple at Ur, and he is frequently mentioned in hymns and inscriptions from the Ur III Period (2047-1750 B.C.) as the chief god of the pantheon with the epithet Enzu, lord of wisdom. His importance is evident in the number of inscriptions which refer to or praise him and the stories in which he features.

The Mesopotamians thus conceived of day, illuminated by the sun, as emanating from the darkness of night and the lesser light of the moon. As the time of lovemaking, the night and the moon were linked to the goddess of the erotic. As a source of light, the moon was also viewed as humanity's protector against acts of criminality undertaken under the cover of darkness even as the illuminating and all-seeing sun was looked upon as a guardian of justice. Ancient History Encyclopaedia.

So Sarai went about her devotions in ignorance and as she grew older, the failure of her prayers and the despair grew. Then an event occurred in the life of her husband which threw her world view into a new light. An answer to prayer had been received, God had spoken to them, but not in the way that they had hoped, in a more magnificent way. How would this word be received? *Gen 12:2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:*

This was a game changer for these two pagans, and although they were beginning their journey of faith, they went along I suppose in their “flesh” hoping that the impossible would happen. Just a miraculous change in Sarai and Abram, and they would have a child. But to convince them it was a true work of God, there had to be absolutely no hope on their behalf. They had to be “dead”.

Rom 4:16 Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, Rom 4:17 (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were. Rom 4:18 Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. Rom 4:19 And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb: Rom 4:20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;

This old and desperate couple, well past their prime, eventually get what they were promised. *Gen 21:6 And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me. Gen 21:7 And she said, Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given children suck? for I have born him a son in his old age.* The joy and relief were palpable to Sarah.

I think that Sarah watched her son Isaac with a mother's care, the care of the only begotten. One day she saw Ishmael laughing at Isaac. Ishmael was 14 years older than Isaac so she saw the first signs of bullying and belittling her son.

*Gen 21:9 And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, **mocking**. Gen 21:10 Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac. Gen 21:11 And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son. Gen 21:12 And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; **in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called**. Gen 21:13 And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed.*

Sarah knew her son Isaac was the child of the promise and apparently Abraham did not. He did not fully understand what was meant by the "seed". It takes thousands of years before Paul clearly explains it.

There is a twofold interpretation of this, one which is earthly and one which is heavenly. As for the earthly, every child of Abraham was a "seed" and in him were all the nations of the earth to be blessed. It was clearly an earthly seed, an election according to the flesh. *Rom 4:18 Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.*

But as Sarah had seen, there was much more to Isaac. An election according to the "promise", a Spiritual calling. *Rom 9:6 Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. **For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel**: Rom 9:7 Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, **In Isaac shall thy seed be called**. Rom 9:8 That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. Rom 9:9 For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sara shall have a son.*

The seed discounted the flesh and counted the promise. And Paul sums it all up in Christ. *Gal 3:16 Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.* It was more than they could ever dream of because through Abraham and Sarah, the Messiah's kingdom would be established. No wonder Isaac respected Sarah, and why he took his wife into her tent. *Gen 24:67 And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.*

And there is another lesson we can offer. You sisters are also daughters of Sarah if you follow in her footprints. *1Pe 3:6 Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as **ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement**.* If you do well, do good and have no fear with "alarm", then that is a woman who is in control of her circumstance, not fazed by circumstance, not frightened with amazement. You are not friends of Sarah, mere acquaintances, you are daughters and she, Sarah, is your New Testament mother.

3. Abram's altar

Gen 12:6 And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. Gen 12:7 And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.

This is Abram's first altar and he builds it after the Lord appeared to him. What are the "Laws of the Altar"? Although the Law was not given as a body yet, it did appear in certain regulations at Abram's time. There was in existence the law of the clean and unclean. The Sabbath day was there in embryo. The law against killing a man was present together with not eating blood with the flesh. I believe the Laws of the altar was set around this time.

The law is eventually codified in the Law of Moses. *Exo 20:22 And the LORD said unto Moses, Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, Ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. Exo 20:23 Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold. Exo 20:24 An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: **in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.** Exo 20:25 And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it. Exo 20:26 Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar, that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon.*

Altars can only exist where God puts His Name. Where man puts His Name, it is **not** an altar. *Gen 22:9 And **they came to the place which God had told him of**; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood.....Gen 35:1 And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and **make there an altar unto God**, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother.*

Churches, by that I mean the buildings, are said to be the house of God. On whose authority? Because a building inspires awe in man, due to its grandeur, it is nothing in the sight of God who made all things. God never gave man leave to build churches or cathedrals in the New Testament and this has caused a lot of misunderstanding as to what the "church" is.

When the Lord appeared to man, it was often to eat a meal with man, a man who was already in Covenant with Him. *Jdg 6:20 And the angel of God said unto him, Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth. And he did so. Jdg 6:21 Then the angel of the LORD put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the LORD departed out of his sight. Jdg 6:22 And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord GOD! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face. Jdg 6:23 And the LORD said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die. Jdg 6:24 Then Gideon built an **altar** there unto the LORD, and called it Jehovahshalom: unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.*

It is a similar occurrence to that of Manoah at Samson's annunciation. *Jdg 13:18 And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret? Jdg 13:19 So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering, and offered it upon a rock unto the LORD: and the angel did*

wondrously; and Manoah and his wife looked on. Jdg 13:20 For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife looked on it, and fell on their faces to the ground. Jdg 13:21 But the angel of the LORD did no more appear to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was an angel of the LORD. The Lord ascends in the fire of the sacrifice.

The Judges have a number of visits from the “Messenger” and this one, to the unknown woman, Manoah’s wife, bears some similarity to Mary’s birth of the Messiah.

1. Both were born miraculously. Samson’s mother was unable to conceive before she became pregnant with Samson. Mary, Jesus’ mother, was a virgin when she became pregnant with Jesus.
2. Angels announced both births. An angel of god appeared to both Samson’s mother and father to announce the birth of Samson and how to bring him up. Angel Gabriel appeared to both Mary and Joseph to announce Jesus’ birth.
3. Both came to deliver their people. Samson was born to deliver Israel from the philistines. Jesus was born through Mary and the Holy Spirit to deliver us from Satan with his blood.
4. Holy Spirit resides in them. The Holy Spirit was with both Samson and Jesus to accomplish their goals.
5. Both have a gentile wife. Both Samson and Jesus have a gentile wife. Samson married a young Philistine woman and has a feast. Jesus’ will have a feast with the church, which is considered a gentile bride, at the end times.
6. Both spoke things in riddles. Samson told a riddle in which most didn’t understand. The men who didn’t understand threatened his wife to give up the answer to the riddle. Jesus told parables in which most didn’t understand. He would explain them only to his disciples.
7. Both betrayed by a loved one. Samson was betrayed by his girlfriend, Delilah, for 1,100 pieces of silver. Jesus was betrayed by his own disciple, Judas, for 30 pieces of silver.
8. Both deaths defeated their enemies. Samson killed all his enemies when he pushed the supporting pillars in the temple of the Philistines. Jesus destroyed Satan when he died on the cross.

The parallels speak of events before their time and that is a part of typology. You will see that it was Christ there with them, The Angel was with them.

What I do not understand, is why there is no consistent translation of the word “angel”. We should really call Him “the **Messenger** of the Lord” and by doing that would see Christ more clearly. *Mal 3:1 “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. Mal 3:2 But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap. Mal 3:3 He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD. Mal 3:4 Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.*

The first messenger is John the Baptist. *Mal 3:1 "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me.* The second is Christ. *Mal 3:1 And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.* Two messengers, one message.

The Messenger of the Lord who appeared to Gideon and Samson, is the same Messenger who comes to the Temple, Christ Jesus and He is the giver of every altar in the OT. *1Jn 4:12 No man hath seen God at any time..... Jdg 6:22 And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord GOD! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face.*

What are altars there for? They were special places for God to meet with man. A place for communal meals, but also they also were a place of sacrifice and the animal that was sacrificed was typical of the true sacrifice of man and the Head of mankind. For example when a man sacrificed an animal for sin, he was in effect throwing himself on the altar. He was admitting guilt, the death sentence was upon him and he was dead, immolated on the altar.

I think that Revelation chapter 6 speaks of this. *Rev 6:8 And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth. Rev 6:9 And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of **them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:** Rev 6:10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? Rev 6:11 And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, **that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.***

The grate under the altar caught the ashes. *Exo 27:4 And thou shalt make for it a grate of network of brass; and upon the net shalt thou make four brasen rings in the four corners thereof. Exo 27:5 And thou shalt put it under the compass of the altar beneath, that the net may be even to the midst of the altar.*

Are these people in Revelation chapter 6 special, a select group or are they all Christians? I think that they are ALL Christians. All Christians have died to self. *Rom 6:10 For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Rom 6:11 Likewise **reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin,** but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Rom 6:12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.* They await the death of their fellow servants, when they shall arise to condemn the world.

The Tabernacle and its types, is always something a devotional Christian approaches with relish. But they quickly doff their hats at the Altar, the Laver and run in to the tent of the meeting with scarcely a backward look. Why was the Altar the first thing we encounter but the last thing we consider in



Figure 4 The Tabernacle

detail? Why is it barring the way to the Tabernacle?

When you approach the Tabernacle, it is not a common meal that you share, that Bread is found inside the Tent, it is a sacrifice for sin, outside in full view of all. You eat at a table, the table of showbread.

What is the order of salvation, the Ordo Salutis? Ordo Salutis is a term meaning **order of salvation**, which refers to a sequence of steps involved in the salvation of a Christian. Each of the benefits of salvation is purchased by Jesus Christ and then applied to the church and every member of the church. We neither purchase salvation (Christ did that on the cross) nor do we apply salvation to ourselves (Christ does that by the Holy Spirit). The stages of salvation in the correct logical order are Election, Regeneration, Calling, Faith, Justification, Sanctification and Glorification.

*Rom 8:29 For whom he did **foreknow**, he also did **predestinate** to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Rom 8:30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also **called**: and whom he called, them he also **justified**: and whom he justified, them he also **glorified**. Rom 8:29 because whom He did **foreknow**, He also did **fore-appoint**, conformed to the image of His Son, that he might be first-born among many brethren; Rom 8:30 and whom He did fore-appoint, these also He did **call**; and whom He did call, these also He declared **righteous**; and whom He declared righteous, these also He did **glorify**. YLT.*

No one comes without that appointment. *Joh 6:44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.* Like the man who made a great supper, many were called and a few chosen. *Luk 14:16 Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: Luk 14:17 And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. Luk 14:18 And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. Luk 14:19 And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. Luk 14:20 And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. Luk 14:21 So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. Luk 14:22 And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. Luk 14:23 And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. Luk 14:24 For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.*

Why have they failed of the Grace of God? They see salvation but do not value it, they see the world as competing and it is more important to them, they understand it with their minds, but it is far from their hearts, they raise it up intellectually but put it down spiritually. They do not even get as far as the altar.

When the worshipper is first confronted by the Altar, the believer is asked to do something. "Follow me". *Luk 9:59 And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Luk 9:60 Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. Luk 9:61 And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them*

farewell, which are at home at my house. Luk 9:62 And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

It is all or nothing. *Luk 14:33 So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.*

This “all” is life itself. The poor widow cast in the Treasury her all, her life. *Mar 12:43 And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: Mar 12:44 For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her **living**.* The word “living” is βίος = bios, life. She cast herself upon God, her life to the wind of the Spirit.

A view of sacrifice is that man was appeasing a perpetually angry God and that this God required man to sacrifice burnt offerings to appease Him. God was a cruel God and harsh, consuming animal flesh, holding man in fear of Him. God was developing just as man was. Such is the perverted view of sacrifice, a caricature of the Almighty, and a complete misreading of the purpose of sacrifice. *1Sa 15:22 And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. 1Sa 15:23 For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.*

Man eventually lost sight of the meaning of sacrifice, but I do not think it was so at the beginning. Sacrifice on the Altar did not evolve, it **devolved** and it became a perversion of that original purity.

When a man comes to God, he must ask this question. Am I prepared to give myself wholeheartedly, completely or am I only partially committed? This I think is the first thing that should be considered. The Altar stands before all else. Will you throw yourself upon it, completely sacrifice your life? Some men think that they say sorry and all is forgiven and God is your chum but it requires this commitment. People who are “interested” in Christ but not committed are still in a state of Nature, they are lost. Some even “give their heart”, but this too is a lie. Your heart is sinful and desperately wicked and never in the history of sacrifice, is a heart mentioned. It is not like the Maya who cut open the victim and reveal a still beating heart.

The animal sacrificed on the Altar, is **you**. It is a substitute for **you**, it is a type of the true substitute, Christ. If your life is not given to God in its entirety, a whole burnt offering, then you are not the Lord's. If you are not totally consumed to ashes before God, you are none of His.

You may not know exactly what God has in store for you and that does not matter, as long as you are a living sacrifice. *Rom 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies **a living sacrifice**, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. Rom 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. All will work out well.*

When Abram set up his first altar, it was in Shechem, where Jesus proclaimed Himself as the water of life. I wonder how much he knew of what was coming.

4. Famine

Gen 12:10 And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land.

We sometimes view the perverse providence of God with amazement that our God would bring us to starvation, as part of His purpose. Yet it is in the interweaving of providence that it will look as a natural disaster to one and the elective guidance of God to another. The same event comes upon all men, but depending on their world view, they will interpret it differently. The events which got Abram moving out of the land of the Chaldees, were the events which established him in Canaan, and he saw the Hand moving him. *Rom 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*

In the land promised to him, another climatic event was looming on Abram's horizon. Prolonged drought has a devastating effect in areas which are highly dependent upon rainfall, farmers are devastated and those whose livelihood depends upon grazing land for their herds, have to go where there is pasture or feed their flocks with grain purchased from afar. Isaac settled in Gerar during a famine (Genesis chapter 26) and planted crops for the first time (Genesis 26:12-13). *Gen 26:1 And there was a famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went unto Abimelech king of the Philistines unto Gerar. Gen 26:2 And the LORD appeared unto him, and said, Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of: Gen 26:3 Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father; Gen 26:4 And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; Gen 26:5 Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.*

During a severe regional famine, Jacob sent to Egypt to purchase grain *Gen 41:27 And the seven thin and ill favoured kine that came up after them are seven years; and the seven empty ears blasted with the east wind shall be seven years of famine.* He finally settled there in Goshen but Abraham was the first of his clan to head to the Nile delta area to keep his herds and his family alive.

The Nile River is the longest river in the world, called the father of African rivers. It rises south of the Equator and flows northward through north eastern Africa to drain into the Mediterranean Sea. It has a length of about 4,132 miles (6,650 kilometres) and drains an area estimated at 1,293,000 square miles (3,349,000 square kilometres). Its basin includes parts of Tanzania, Burundi, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Sudan, and the cultivated part of Egypt. Its most distant source is the Kagera River in Burundi.

The availability of water from the Nile throughout the year, combined with the area's high temperatures, makes possible intensive cultivation along its banks. For centuries, the Nile River flooded the valley, enriching the land with a thick layer of alluvial soil. Flooding occurred from July to September as the result of the tropical rains in the Ethiopian tableland. The river attained its highest level in October and then began to recede to its lowest point sometime between April and June. It was a good choice of somewhere to go, for Abraham.

On his way he would have seen The Great Pyramid of Giza (also known as the Pyramid of Khufu or the Pyramid of Cheops) which is the oldest and largest of the three pyramids in the Giza pyramid complex, bordering present-day Giza in Greater Cairo. It is the oldest of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World and the only one to remain largely intact. It was already hundreds of years old when Abram first saw it and it would have looked very different, being cased in white marble, an object to astound every viewer. If it is a marvel today, think what it was then.



Figure 5 The great Pyramid, then and now

It was as he was approaching Egypt, that Abram had a thought.

Gen 12:11 And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon: Gen 12:12 Therefore it

shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive. Gen 12:13 Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee.

Abram had been thinking the worst and it appears there is no guidance from God as to what he should do, to allay his fears. What if he is right and the Egyptians take Sarah and kill him, what then of the prophecy of God? This was the best way to deal with it as far as he knew and before you start condemning him for a lack of faith, think back in your own lives to that time that God did not answer your prayer and you went ahead in your own strength, perhaps with good intent. Its all very well to be wise after the event, but in the moment, sometimes you just act.

This is a moment that is repeated, not once but three times in the history of the patriarchs. *Gen 20:2 And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah. Gen 26:7 And the men of the place asked him of his wife; and he said, She is my sister: for he feared to say, She is my wife; lest, said he, the men of the place should kill me for Rebekah; because she was fair to look upon. Gen 26:8 And it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out at a window, and saw, and, behold, Isaac was sporting with Rebekah his wife.*

Rebekah is the cousin, not sister of Isaac *Gen 22:23 And Bethuel begat Rebekah: these eight Milcah did bear to Nahor, Abraham's brother.* But there is no generic Hebrew word for “cousin” so this may be a technically correct statement.

The sister/bride is a motif for the writing of Solomon’s song. *Son 4:7 Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee. Son 4:8 Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards. Son 4:9 Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck. Son 4:10 How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! how much better is thy love than wine! and the smell of thine ointments than all spices!*

It shows in type the relationship between Christ and the Church. *Gal 2:20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*

But the contrast with Abraham is astounding, and if it were true, shows he held Sarai in low esteem, which I doubt very much. There are three cases of the sister/spouse relationship where, apparently, the spouse saves himself, but which is totally at odds with the role of the husband. *Eph 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and **gave himself for it***; What are we to make of this? Abraham does not act in the Spirit of Ephesians 5. He is not Christ to Sarai's Church, far from it. And yet God does not show his displeasure in it, and makes no comment on the morality of the situation. So what caused this to come about?

Did Abram act in the spirit of unconscious prophecy? Was the event something he entered into, speaking but not understanding? There are cases of an individual not knowing why he said or did something.

Peter was at a loss for words yet he spoke. *Luk 9:33 And it came to pass, as they departed from him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias: **not knowing** what he said.* Caiaphas prophesied to the nation of Israel, *Joh 11:49 And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, Joh 11:50 Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. Joh 11:51 And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; Joh 11:52 And not for that nation only, but that also **he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.***

Abram could though, have acted with God's blessing and conscious knowledge, except that it is not recorded. The outcome is, Abram is not rebuked, in fact he is given much more than he had when he came into Egypt and the Lord found reason to put a plague on Pharaoh's house. It is hardly a rebuke to Abram, rather it is part of the promise to him. *Gen 12:2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: Gen 12:3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*

It is a foretaste of what God will do to Egypt. *Exo 3:19 And I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand. Exo 3:20 And I will stretch out my hand, and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go. Exo 3:21 And I will give this people favour in the sight of the Egyptians: and it shall come to pass, that, when ye go, ye shall not go empty: Exo 3:22 But every woman shall borrow of her neighbour, and of her that sojourneth in her house, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: and ye shall put them upon your sons, and upon your daughters; and ye shall spoil the Egyptians.*

It was an indication of the long war with Egypt culminating in the last Exodus, *Rev 11:8 And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.*

In a strange way Abram sees the future of Christ and the Church, but cannot fulfil the role of Christ in it. *Joh 2:4 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come. **Abram must not die for the Bride***, but another will, *Gen 12:11 And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon: Gen 12:12 Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and **they will kill me, but they will save thee alive.***

Abram is saying that he is not the one, the deliverer, the Saviour. *Luk 7:20 When the men were come unto him, they said, John Baptist hath sent us unto thee, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?* It was another that they looked for.

This is an intriguing passage with so many questions we would like to ask the Lord. Perhaps the most important to be answered is “Why did You write this passage in Genesis?”

It seems strange that the Egyptians saved Abram rather than destroyed him. Ham had seen Noah’s nakedness and God cursed not him, but his son Canaan. *Gen 9:22 And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without. Gen 9:23 And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness. Gen 9:24 And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. Gen 9:25 And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.* Mizraim, a second son of Ham, was not cursed and from him come the Egyptians.

The Egyptians are given by God to look after Abram and make him rich. They preserve him through the famine and he passes unmolested. As Joseph said: *Gen 50:20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.* In a strange way God allows us to exist with the unbeliever, partake of his goods, and yet not partake of his end. The devil will try his best to defeat man but will eventually lose out. *Rom 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*

It is a hard concept to grasp. All the pain we suffer, all the sickness, the wickedness we commission, the suffering we inflict on others, the deceit we hide from God, all that you can think of, works together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose. The people who would cast a stone at “faithful Abraham” do not see the grace shown to him and that he is being chiselled for glory, day by day, week by week, and year by year.

Have you noticed that when they are finally with the Lord, that the Lord does not have a bad word to say against them? *Heb 11:32 And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets:*

Samson suffered humiliation, was blinded, betrayed God's trust, went after Philistine women, but these things worked for his good and no mention of his sins is ever made again. This will be true of you. If God has nothing to say against him and Abraham was His friend, then be very careful about the remarks you make against Abraham.

5. Plague

The famine had issued in a plague for Pharaoh's house, the first recordings of such events in the Bible. It does not mean that it was the first time these events occurred, but it is significant for us as the first plague of the Bible and the last plagues are on Pharaoh's house. *Rev 11:7 And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them. Rev 11:8 And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and **Egypt**, where also our Lord was crucified.*

The plague was often seen as the hand of God and those far off people did not see God's minions, the virus and the bacteria, working His purpose out. Yes, they work His purpose, despite having a temporal cause, they are working the moral will of God. The first plague is on account of a moral failure. *Gen 12:17 And the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram's wife.*

The plague came to Pharaoh's house without warning. It did come with an explanation which he acknowledges. *Gen 12:18 And Pharaoh called Abram, and said, What is this that thou hast done unto me? why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife?* Plague does not always come with an explanation, and that is not at all unfair. If man has drifted away from his Creator then it is his duty to get within hearing of Him or else suffer the consequence.

Alas, some are not spoken to and others have their ears sealed. *Mat 13:13 Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. Mat 13:14 And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: Mat 13:15 For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.*

This will be one of the ways that God deals with man, the plague. Abraham has already experienced another of the ways God works with man, **famine**. God did not have to bring Abram to Egypt by means of famine, He could have just directed Abram to go down but He did not. He went down under perverse providence. Perhaps there was a reason in the growing sin of the inhabitants of Canaan?

In the book of Revelation, we read of the, so called, Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. They are released after the seals are broken. *Rev 6:1 And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. Rev 6:2 And I saw, and behold a **white horse**: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer. Rev 6:3 And when he had opened the second seal, I*

*heard the second beast say, Come and see. Rev 6:4 And there went out another **horse that was red**: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword. Rev 6:5 And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a **black horse**; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. Rev 6:6 And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine. Rev 6:7 And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see. Rev 6:8 And I looked, and behold a **pale horse**: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. **And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.***

These four horsemen are familiar figures from the Old Testament and so there is nothing to indicate that they are released into creation in the last days. They already exist and are going up and down the earth! In Zechariah (chapter 6 v 1 - 8) they are hitched to chariots. They are the four winds of heaven. *Zec 6:5 And the angel answered and said unto me, These are the four spirits of the heavens, which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth. which blow over the whole earth* and as such they satisfy the angel of God, although they are not always present in the same location at the same time. To what extent the Saints of the Old Testament understood their purpose is not made clear.

The white horse also appears in Revelation (*Rev 19:11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war*) and as such is the steed of Christ, who subdues the nations by His word. The colour white is indicative of righteousness. (*Rev 19:8 And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.*) I would suggest that the nature of this conquering is particularly spiritual. *Eph 6:12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places* in opposition to the temporal conquering of the red horse. The book of "Revelation" by MAW.

<https://archive.org/details/REVELATIONByMAW>

Now I do not think that the book of Revelation is introducing the Horsemen as if they first appear in the apocalyptic vision of the last days. No, it is not just in the end that they appear. Revelation is looking at the whole of history and by introducing the horsemen, we are shown what God has done from the fall. This is the book of Revelation now giving us a clearer picture of history, by introducing the Horsemen to us. *Rom 16:25 Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, Rom 16:26 But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:*

The increasing revelation as the day's decline, comforts the saints. *Rev 1:1 A Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to Him to show to His slaves things which must occur quickly. And He signified by sending through His angel to His slave, John, LITV.* This first comfort is seeing Christ, before anything else, riding forth on a white horse, into a fallen world, conquering, with a bow in His hand. It may not seem that He is conquering, but it will be revealed how subtly He did it. We should keep this vision in mind as we go through the life of Abraham, for it is Christ the Conqueror who is with Him and incidentally: *Rom 8:37 Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.*

Our purpose is not to look at all the horsemen at this time but to concentrate on the "bringer of death and the grave", the pale horse.

The pale (Chloros = green, whence 'chlorine') rider that follows brings death in a more general form. His sword = romphaia, *Rev 19:15 And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God,* it is the broad sword as opposed to the short sword = makaira of Rev 6 v 4 and symbolises justice rather than war.

If I were to make a distinction between the red and the pale horse, it would be that death brought about by the red horse centres upon the attitude of the people to God Himself. Death by the pale horse is brought about by the attitude of the people to the law of God. *Deu 28:15 But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee.* There is a principle of death at work in society which operates in every sphere (the sword in the moral/historical sphere, famine in the economic/biological sphere, beasts in the moral/biological sphere). Death as such is not irrational, purposeless or meaningless. When we are confronted with death we do not always have the specific reason for its appearance. We often quite clearly see the effect, but relating the effect to the reason is not so easy.

For David the reason was clear. *2Sa 24:12 Go and say unto David, Thus saith the LORD, I offer thee three things; choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee.* The causes had varying durations and intensities, but the final outcome was the same. Death! This story teaches us that we may suffer because of our leaders, so it is important to exercise constraints upon those who would rule over us, rather than let them get on with it. *1Ti 2:1 I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; 1Ti 2:2 For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.* Prayer implies that we also have some accompanying actions to perform, for we do not just pray for bread and stay at home. Christians can be "politically" active.

Evil continues with us from the beginning of the Fall. *"Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with*

death, and with the beasts of the earth”, this tribulation will continue and get worse. Mat 24:6 And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. Mat 24:7 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. Mat 24:8 All these are the beginning of sorrows.

These are not only punishments, they are deterrents, they are sent as a warning to man of his frailty, but more than this, in his arrogance man loses sight of Almighty God and so these perversities are sent to make him consider his place in the Universe, and without holding God’s hand, it is a very dangerous place to be and a precarious situation.

By famine, He causes us to consider our daily bread. The miracle of growth, seedtime and harvest. The wonder of light and its capture by the plants whereby it is turned into food. Photosynthesis is a chemical reaction that takes place inside a plant, producing food for the plant to survive. Carbon dioxide, water and light are all needed for photosynthesis to take place, but we seldom if ever think of this. We go to the shops to get our food and do we give thanks to God or Tesco?

By the weather and climate He causes us to consider who is in charge. We battle the straw man of climate change, while CO₂ levels steadily increase, despite the lack of global travel, we are confronted with the big why? Why if man made sources of CO₂ are down (due to the current pandemic), is the level going up? It is because they are looking to the wrong cause. This is not man’s planet, he is but a worm living by God’s grace, a tenant on it, a servant not a ruler. *Psa 24:1 A Psalm of David. The earth is the LORD’S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. Psa 24:2 For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods.* Until man recognises his true position on Earth, he will suffer. *Psa 148:7 All creatures on earth, you obey his commands, so come praise the LORD! Psa 148:8 Sea monsters and the deep sea, fire and hail, snow and frost, and every stormy wind, come praise the LORD!* They praise Him by doing His will.

And if this were not enough, God must then challenge their mortality. Death and hell followed. When all has failed, then life itself is forfeit. First comes sickness and illness, and he is shown the frailty of his own body as it declines. Solomon warned of this decline. *Ecc 12:1 Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; Ecc 12:2 While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain: Ecc 12:3 In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, Ecc 12:4 And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low; Ecc 12:5 Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: Ecc 12:6 Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Ecc 12:7 Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. Ecc 12:8 Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity.*

The fool regards not the hand of the Almighty and that riches are as ephemeral as the very breath we breathe. *Luk 12:16 And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: Luk 12:17 And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? Luk 12:18 And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. Luk 12:19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. Luk 12:20 But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? Luk 12:21 So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.*

Abram had seen the hand of God in his life and he would grow to understand it more, as his body wore out. *Heb 11:9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: Heb 11:10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.* He saw this world for what it was and it made him long for that heavenly city.

This aspect of Abram's longing for a heavenly City, is brought home to us by Christ's words. If anyone is to greet us in heaven, it is not Peter, it is Father Abraham. In that paradise of God he welcomes and comforts the faithful. Those who rejected or neglected God, are lost, and it is too late. *Luk 16:30 And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. Luk 16:31 And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.* No, they had Moses but they did not believe him.

Abraham is the City's keeper.

6. Lot

Gen 11:31 And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there. Gen 11:32 And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran..... Gen 12:4 So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. Gen 12:5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.

I want establish something about Lot before we delve deeper. Before we are tempted to assassinate his character, we must heed scripture. He was righteous. *2Pe 2:6 And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after **should live ungodly**; 2Pe 2:7 And delivered **just Lot**, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: 2Pe 2:8 (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, **vexed his righteous soul** from day to day with their unlawful deeds;) 2Pe 2:9 The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished:*

We must bear in mind when looking at his character, that he was not ungodly and that he was vexed, weighed down with their filthy conversation that is the conduct, of the wicked. He was vexed, weighted down with their lawlessness. He maintained that witness throughout his stay at Sodom, and God never rebukes him for any of his deeds. He was righteous and is righteous, such as if you could see him in glory you would stagger at his beauty, for he is like the angels.

I want to give you this thought to meditate upon. God never condemns or says anything against a believer when looking back upon their life, despite any of their sins. It is as if The Lord sees them through the lens of Eternity, through the lens of Christ, by which I mean, outside of time and away from all sin and if there was sin it is not present under His gaze. He sees Abraham and Lot as righteous and so should we. We should not throw the muck of this dying world at them, as if they were worse than we are. To bring them to nothing is to bring us down and to make the Cross of no effect. No, we must see them as glorious in their perfection. Do we see Lot as God saw him, or do we continue to see imperfection? How do you want to be seen?

It is from eternity that we can truly see what God says and sees. *Rom 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.* All the things in Lot's life were part of the eternal plan, made solely for him, tailor made, that he should fulfil. Likewise God has an individual, bespoke plan for your life and all for your good.

Just why Lot accompanied Abram is not known. Perhaps it was because he too was called with Abram? Was he the son Abraham longed for? Perhaps it was because of his daughter's who were to give birth to the Moabites and Ammonites? Christ came from a Moabitess. Or perhaps it was to give us an example of intercession by Abram? It may all of these.

After Abram left Egypt trouble broke out with their herdsmen. *Gen 13:1 And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south.....Gen 13:7 And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land. Gen 13:8 And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; **for we be brethren.***

Graciously Abram concedes the land to Lot as they remain brethren. *Gen 13:9 Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left. Gen 13:10 And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, **even as the garden of the LORD**, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar. Gen 13:11 Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other.*

Abram's great charity to Lot perhaps shows his faith in the promise of God to give him that land and this is another proof of it. Lot did not choose the land of promise but the land of a curse. It was indeed a beautiful land Lot chose, then it was like the garden of Eden, it was like Egypt, it was beautiful and abundant in all its resources. It is not how you find it today. The catastrophe that befell Sodom put paid to that, but also the climate was changing. I wonder whether the events were not

just global but whether some were regional. There is famine in Canaan but not in the region of the Dead Sea.

Are you among those who think that Lot made an error in going to Sodom and Gomorrah? The cess pool of filthy living, the sewer of life, the cities that have gone down in history as places of depravity. If you think that you make better choices than Lot, then think again. What is the place like where you live, is it morally any better than Sodom? We have a prime minister who is a liar and who is an adulterer. The Scottish National Party now has the highest proportion of gay, bi and lesbian representation of any party in parliament, at 21 per cent, while 5.5 per cent of Conservative MPs and 7.4 per cent of Labour MPs identify as LGBT+. We are nationally ripe for judgement and if you say nothing about it and do nothing about it WHY? Do not take up stones to throw at Lot.

It is today, the same as at the time as Noah, the same as at the time as Lot and the same as at the time as Jesus comes. The world is in a state of judgement and the signs are obvious today. *Luk 17:26 And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. Luk 17:27 They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Luk 17:28 Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; Luk 17:29 But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Luk 17:30 Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.*

But before the fall of Sodom and Gomorrah there is a kidnapping. A powerful coalition of Mesopotamian Kings conquered the trans-Jordan tribes of Rephaim, Zuzim, Emim and Horites and South Eastern Canaan. This conquest led to revolt and eventual re-subjugation of local Kings on the south side of the Dead Sea (The Valley of Siddim), including Sodom and Gomorrah.

Abraham was in a tent in Hebron when he learned that his nephew Lot had been captured along with the spoils of Sodom. With only 318 men Abraham pursued and defeated the Mesopotamian Armies north of Damascus. Abraham knew like his descendants Gideon and Jonathan, that the Lord is not restrained to save by many or few. Following the defeat of the Mesopotamian Kings, Abraham met Melchizidec, whose name means King of Righteousness. Melchizidec was King of Salem and priest of the Most High God.

Returned to Sodom, Lot settles into life as an “elder” in the gates of the City. A witness to righteousness, *Gen 19:1 And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground; It is there that the two men came on the Lord’s business, Gen 18:20 And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; Gen 18:21 I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know.*

The men at Sodom were base and demanded the men be brought out from Lot’s house where they had been persuaded to stay. Lot offers his daughters. This brings to the fore that the men of Sodom were homosexual and that they wanted men not women and perhaps Lot knew this.

The die was cast and Lot, plus those who would go out of the city with him, were delivered, *Gen 19:10 But the men put forth their hand, and pulled Lot into the house to them, and shut to the door. Gen 19:11 And they smote the men that were at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great: so that they wearied themselves to find the door. Gen 19:12 And the men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? son in law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place: Gen 19:13 For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the LORD; and the LORD hath sent us to destroy it.*

It could be said of Lot, that from being a town dweller, he became a cave man. He escapes to Zoar and from there to a cave, where an event so misinterpreted takes place, that it nearly damns him. His daughters concoct a plan to get pregnant by him, which many term incest but he is never rebuked by God for it. The children of the liaison are blessed and given an inheritance, Moab and Ammon, and one gives birth in the generations to come to a progenitor of Christ, Ruth the Moabitess.

The daughters get him to drink, not that he gets drunk in order to commit incest. Why did this happen and what was the reason for this? It is a repeat of the judgement of Noah and the judgement of Adam, to show that man was not improved one whit. Notice the similarities. Lot is in “the garden of God”, Eden. *Gen 13:10 And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, **even as the garden of the LORD**, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar.*

When the judgement strikes it is without warning. *Luk 17:26 And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. Luk 17:27 They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Luk 17:28 Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; Luk 17:29 **But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.*** When the righteous man went the judgement came.

Like Noah, Lot gets “drunk”. I refer you back to our study on Noah in “Christ the Creator” (page 150). https://archive.org/details/christ-the-creator_202006 Noah entered that “state” of New Covenant, he drank the wine of the Covenant in Christ’s blood and those who did not see it were punished. Noah was not punished and so it could not have been a sin. Lot took wine and in that same state of Divine intoxication, and gave seed to his daughters. Remember, Lot is a righteous brother.

The outcome of this act is very interesting. *Deu 2:9 And the LORD said unto me, Distress not the Moabites, neither contend with them in battle: for I will not give thee of their land for a possession; because I have given Ar **unto the children of Lot for a possession**.....Deu 2:19 And when thou comest nigh over against the children of Ammon, distress them not, nor meddle with them: for I will not give thee of the land of the children of Ammon any possession; because I have given it **unto the children of Lot for a possession.***

God did not intend the children born to Lot any harm and He neither punished Lot nor his daughters for this event. But although they had been shown this favour by God it was short lived. *Num 22:1 And the children of Israel set forward, and pitched in the plains of Moab on this side Jordan by*

Jericho. Num 22:2 And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. Num 22:3 And Moab was sore afraid of the people, because they were many: and Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel. Num 22:4 And Moab said unto the elders of Midian, Now shall this company lick up all that are round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field. And Balak the son of Zippor was king of the Moabites at that time. Num 22:5 He sent messengers therefore unto Balaam the son of Beor to Pethor, which is by the river of the land of the children of his people, to call him, saying, Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me: Num 22:6 Come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people; for they are too mighty for me: peradventure I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land: for I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed.

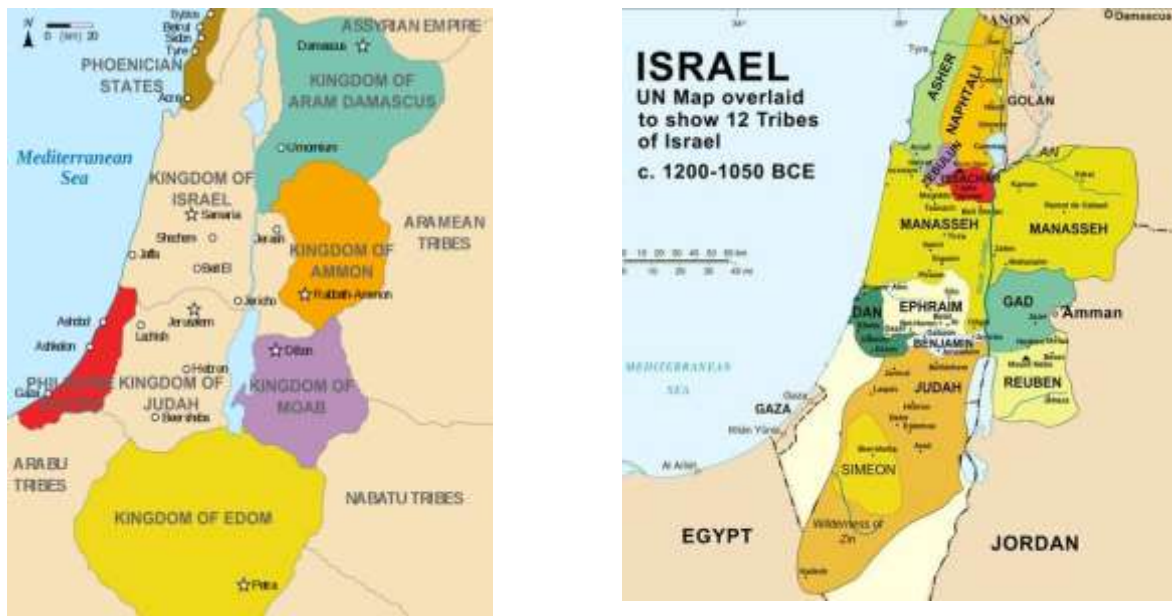


Figure 6 The tribes surrounding Israel

As a result they were barred for a period from the congregation of Israel. Deu 23:3 An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever: Deu 23:4 Because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt; and because they hired against thee Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse thee. Deu 23:5 Nevertheless the LORD thy God would not hearken unto Balaam; but the LORD thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee, because the LORD thy God loved thee. Deu 23:6 Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever.

What does this mean? Simply that God is forgiving to His people that He foreknew. Two of Christ's relatives are from the Ammonites and Moabites. 1Ki 14:21 And Rehoboam the son of Solomon reigned in Judah. Rehoboam was forty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the LORD did choose out of all the tribes of Israel, to put

his name there. And his mother's name was Naamah an Ammonitess..... Rth 4:10 Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day.

Righteous Lot did go to be in the pantheon of Christ. But remember well, what happened to his wife, she turned to salt because she looked back, and set her eyes on the past and did not look to the future. *Luk 17:32 Remember Lot's wife.*

7. The City of God

If you want a brief commentary on the Jews you need go no further than this, Stephen's speech in the book of Acts. We do not need modernists in the church who sanctify the Jews and see their restoration as essential to the progress of the Church and the Kingdom, to misinform us. The Temple was not on earth, it was in Heaven, for this was God's throne but the earthly Jews denied this.

*Act 7:2 And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, Act 7:3 And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee. Act 7:4 Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell. Act 7:5 And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child..... Act 7:45 Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David; Act 7:46 Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. Act 7:47 But Solomon built him an house. Act 7:48 Howbeit **the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands**; as saith the prophet, Act 7:49 Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Act 7:50 Hath not my hand made all these things? Act 7:51 **Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.** Act 7:52 Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Act 7:53 Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.*

Stephen, in his inspired speech to the High Priest and rulers of the Jews, states quite clearly why the people of Israel deviated from the path of Abraham and killed the Christ, the Lord's anointed. They did so because of their innate hardness of heart, their intransigence and they killed the prophets who came to warn them, they became betrayers and murderers of Christ and they kept not the law. Beginning with Abraham, their "father", Stephen shows that God gave him "**no inheritance in it**" and yet he promised he would give it to him as a possession. What was the "land" that God was going to give the "seed"?

Moving on to the end of his speech the issue becomes clearer as Stephen observes: *“what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?”* The Jews could not build a house for God to live in, it was impossible, for heaven was Gods throne and Earth His footstool. The earthly Temple was only a symbol, and God “lived” there conditionally.

Did the promise to David abrogate this statement? *2Sa 7:5 Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith the LORD, Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in? 2Sa 7:6 Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle. 2Sa 7:7 In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not me an house of cedar? 2Sa 7:11 And as since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also the LORD telleth thee that he will make thee an house. 2Sa 7:12 And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. 2Sa 7:13 He **shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever.***

No, it did not abrogate it. 40 years was all that Solomon’s kingdom lasted and you could hardly call that “forever”, moreover Solomon was an apostate. This creates a paradox which the Jews and today many Christians fail to see. It is the **paradox of the Kingdom**. How could God promise the Jews a throne and a Kingdom and not state clearly that it was not an earthly Kingdom? Is it a fact that He did not state it? No it is not a fact as we shall see. *Rom 9:6 Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Rom 9:7 Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. Rom 9:8 That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.*

Paul saw the truth of the Kingdom paradox. That there are two Israel’s, the “flesh” and the “promise”, the natural and the spiritual, the carnal and the spiritual. Those who believe that God raises up an earthly Israel in the last days as heirs of the promise are carnal. There are plenty of carnal people around these days and they should know better than to teach what the scripture does not teach, namely that there is a temporal restoration in the last days.

The Kingdom never failed, never needed restoring and never needed its citizen’s to be revived. Every persecuted Israelite, the true Jew of the Israelites of God, may have died under the sword, persecuted by the very people that they had as leaders, *Heb 11:36 And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: Heb 11:37 They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; Heb 11:38 (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. Heb 11:39 And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: Heb 11:40 **God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.***

They all enter the Kingdom of God, having escaped this world, to a better one, “a new (καινός) heaven and a new (καινός) earth”, *Rev 21:1 And I saw a new (καινός) heaven and a new (καινός) earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.* The word for new is καινός = kainos which means new especially in freshness, but something which existed for a long time but is introduced lately. New = νέος = neos is used of something that is youthful, young, hence new wine. The new heaven, to paraphrase it, is of “ancient existence but new in its introduction”.

These Old Testament saints went straight there. *Luk 16:22 And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; Luk 16:23 And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Luk 16:24 And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.*

God does not leave His people in limbo, homeless or unconscious, He gathers them in to Him. *Heb 12:22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, Heb 12:23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.* You do not just go there, you are already there.

Now Stephen says of Abram: *Act 7:5 And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession.* We saw Abram going through the land, almost it seems without stopping, on his way down to Egypt. So what did Father Abram think of the promise? That it had failed, no certainly not? *Heb 11:9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: Heb 11:10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*

It is not just the New Testament Saints, who have this expectation, Abram had it, the father of nations and it did not bother him that there was no place, “*not so much as to set his foot on*”. Why should it bother him, it was not where he was going. In the Old Testament, the father of the faithful had this expectation of heaven, of a Kingdom, the dominion of a King, King Jesus the King of the Jews in the City of God. There are implications to this. Abram looked through this life and so should we. We should not view this life and its contents as permanent, it is transitory. We, like Abram are citizens of Heaven. There is no barrier to heaven, only our unbelief.

Death is often viewed as an obstacle, a scary unknown barrier, something we must go through sometimes in pain, to get to heaven, but that is not how Abram viewed it, “*he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God*”. He did not look at the here and now or have such little faith that he was caught up with death and preoccupied with it, such that he could not see beyond it. He was waiting, looking for with expectation, to the City of God.

I am not saying that we should neglect our duties on earth, become so heavenly minded that we are no earthly use, though many “Christians” are neither heavenly minded or of earthly use. The position we should adopt is lifting our sights beyond the earth, to the heavens. We should become

stargazers rather than earth bound, looking for a City with a Maker. The believer, the follower of Abram, of the seed of Christ, is also something more than a future watcher. He is a pilgrim, *Heb 11:13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers **and pilgrims** on the earth.*

Once pilgrims were persons on a journey to a holy place on earth. There were the Pilgrim Fathers, who established a religious colony in America. But Abram's pilgrimage and the pilgrimage of faithful believers is different. It is not a journey in this life to earthly places. It is as John Bunyan so incisively observed "**The Pilgrim's Progress from This World, to That Which Is to Come**". Written during his imprisonment in the Bedfordshire county prison for violations of the Conventicle Act of 1664, which prohibited the holding of religious services outside the auspices of the established Church of England. John was spitefully punished by that so called church, a church supposedly upholding the Gospel. The Church of England was no different than the men who persecuted Stephen.

God's people were pilgrims passing through. They are called "strangers and pilgrims on earth". *1Pe 2:11 Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; They are strangers, alien residents, they have no citizenship here.*

This is what we became when we were called by Christ. We become "strangers" to this earth. We have no more affiliation to it, no abiding home here. Men get very attached to this world, they have their teams and clubs, political parties, clans, organisations and affiliations but they point back to this world. Will we be proud of them in heaven?

We are pilgrims on this earth, like Abram, just passing through. Trying to get along while keeping unspotted from it. We are learning daily, coming closer to God, more in the image of His Son. Why then do we pollute it? Why do we just party on, go our own way in the face of Jesus, as if He has done nothing for us? Is it as if we were doing Him a favour, accepting His grace? There are those who preach this "cheap grace" and do not bother to look for a lasting change, looking for any fruit in the hearers. Just that their hearers hear the word and no more and that satisfies them. They have preached "a" gospel that is unknown to Jesus.

Even in the early book of Genesis, we find a man hearing God and doing something about it. Abram did not sit down and do nothing, he followed after God, he went on to seek diligently the City of God. He became a sojourner, a pilgrim, following God where he went.

"Do you think I can take you safely across a high wire in my wheelbarrow?" said Blondin the tight rope walker, to a little boy who sat watching his act with amazement. "Oh yes", said the boy, "of course I do". "Then get in the wheelbarrow", invited Blondin. "Not likely" was the reply. The boy believed, but only so far. Trust is believing all the way. Abram trusted God all the way.

And not only did Abram look for The City of God, he looked for its King. *Joh 8:56 Your **father Abraham rejoiced to see my day**: and he saw it, and was glad. Joh 8:57 Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Joh 8:58 Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.*

He looked for Christ and he found Him. He was glad. And it was not only Abram who found the City. *Mat 8:11 And I say unto you, **That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.** Mat 8:12 But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* His God was the God of the living, *Mat 22:31 But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, Mat 22:32 I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, **but of the living.***

This may seem strange to us because we neglect the Older Testament, but believers, in those times, had a sense of the presence of Christ, thousands of years before He came. He was not just for the New Testament only, He was for the Older Testament. For some of the Saints, there was a clearer expectation than others, but I believe they all knew. *Job 19:25 For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: Act 2:30 Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; Act 2:31 He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.*

If they did not know this, how could they be saved? The Law cannot save, cannot make a man just, it is a Person who saves. So I am saying that every soul that is saved, in the Older Testament and the New Testament, must have some knowledge of Christ, an expectation, a vision of the Redeemer and the City of God, like faithful Abraham. As scripture says: *Heb 11:40 God having provided some better thing for us, **that they without us should not be made perfect.***

8. Separation

*Gen 13:6 And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together. Gen 13:7 And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land. Gen 13:8 And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; **for we be brethren.** Gen 13:9 Is not the whole land before thee? **separate thyself, I pray thee, from me:** if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left. Gen 13:10 And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar. Gen 13:11 Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other. Gen 13:12 Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom. Gen 13:13 But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly.*

They had so much cattle and substance that the land could not bear Abram and Lot and the herdsmen began striving together. Rather than fight over the land they decided upon an amicable split, after all they were “brothers” and would remain so, but this was an opportunity for them, to grow in peace. They could again expand and multiply in peace and Abram concedes to his younger relative the choice of land. They separated and went their own ways.

When Adam and his generations were alive, there was apparently no move to separate the people and it is not certain whether they fulfilled the creation mandate. *Gen 1:28 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.* This may account for the lack of human skeletons around the world. After the flood, as we saw, man was forcibly dispersed, separated, by an act of God.

Separation is a word churches do not like. They like amalgamation, large groups and that under a few men. Call them what you will, they try to gather souls in to their net and this has a particular result. It results in the diminishing number of Bible teachers in the Assembly, a lack of elders and the people as a result do not do much study for themselves. The bigger the gathering, the safer they feel, safety in numbers and the less they will do, and the more ignorant they become.

The advantages of splitting down are obvious. You get a more intense fellowship, with fewer people present and hopefully this smaller fellowship has more opportunity to participate. They know one another, their needs and their aspirations. They cannot hide in the crowd. You also should get a wealth of teachers and elders in each cellular church. You break the hold of men who would seek power, for there is little to take power over. The cost of home meeting places is also negligible as there are no big buildings. The pastor is a working man, not someone who reads all day. Like Paul, he has a "tent making" business and so does not milk the church of resources, money for the building, money for pastors, money that is hard won and easily lost by this folly.

Are there really that lack of people in God's army, ready to put themselves forward or are the timid, conscientious objectors, the hearers of the word and not doers, all that we have? No wonder the Church is in such a weak and feeble state. If ministers are to serve, then that does not mean serve themselves, it mean that they should work with their own hands and they would have something of their own to give, instead of giving what others have laboured for and given. They should have something to give.

If ministers have a gift, then let them use it, for freely have they received it and should freely use it, without selling it. Instead of making money out of the flock they should be working with the flock, *1Pe 5:2 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 1Pe 5:3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. 1Pe 5:4 And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.....Zec 11:5 Whose possessors slay them, and hold themselves not guilty: and they that sell them say, Blessed be the LORD; for I am rich: and their own shepherds pity them not.* We need to start practicing Christianity, not merely sitting about hearing what it can do, but doing it.

Abram did not hesitate to separate.

We separate ourselves from the world and its children, *2Co 6:14 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? 2Co 6:15 And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? 2Co 6:16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in*

them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 2Co 6:17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, 2Co 6:18 And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

The yoke is something that shares the burden, *Deu 22:10 Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together.* Notice the two animals. The mighty ox and the donkey. The ox will be doing all of the work and the ass will be a burden to him in doing the task. Do not be burdened with the weak and feeble elements of this world.

Now what things in particular do we need to avoid? Do we separate on account of the Gospel? No, God forbid, for we must go into the whole world, as He said: *Mar 16:15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.* No one is hindered from hearing the good news unless they themselves do not want to hear. We do not discard the unbeliever but meet his needs, not wants, *Pro 25:21 If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: Pro 25:22 For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee.*

How far do we go with them in the pleasantries of life? We greet them, we exchange small talk, we do good to them, we do not avoid them, but there is a limit, *2Co 6:14 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.* Who are the unbelievers? They are the people who have acknowledged Christ, made a profession of faith, done many good things, but have not followed after God, *Mat 7:21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Mat 7:22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? Mat 7:23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*

Unbelievers form a spectrum of people, from ardent church goers, nominal “Christians” and downright unbelievers. Unbelievers are not just “lukewarm” believers, they are rank enemies of Christ. They hate Him. Do we separate ourselves from all people who are of this nature? My friend Riaan gave me a good example of an unbeliever, a distinction between a Christian and a Child of God. His analogy was: “go sleep in your garage for the night and see whether you will wake up as a car the next morning – it won’t happen.” You are not a believer by association, by osmosis with other believers or by association with the church. But they are your neighbours!

Paul knew the difference between believers and unbelievers. *Gal 1:15 But when it pleased God, who **separated** me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, Gal 1:16 To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:* There was a vast gulf between him and the world. He himself could not have preached Christ while a murderer or a drunk or a thief or a homosexual. It would have severely compromised his witness.

You should separate yourselves from the slightest thing that compromises your witness and the ungodly, that would join with you. Anything which makes your testimony hollow is an unequal yoke. *Lev 22:1 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Lev 22:2 Speak unto Aaron and to his sons, that they separate themselves from the holy things of the children of Israel, and that they profane not my*

*holy name in those things which they hallow unto me: I am the LORD. Lev 22:3 Say unto them, Whosoever he be of all your seed among your generations, that goeth unto the holy things, which the children of Israel hallow unto the LORD, **having his uncleanness upon him, that soul shall be cut off from my presence: I am the LORD.*** We are called to be separate because it is fundamental to Holiness.

The recent demise of Ravi Zacharias, and his post mortem/legacy, is a great sadness among the churches. This magazine Article in Christianity Today (CT) explains it.

Internal dissension is still roiling inside RZIM (Ravi Zacharias International Ministry). Some staff members argue the \$36 million global ministry, built on the late apologist's reputation for faith and truth, could become a model for dealing with scandal or could be another example of an institution preserving its power at the cost of its Christian witness.

RZIM staff originally heard that the allegations against Zacharias were baseless attacks designed to hurt their gospel work. But some began to openly reject that narrative, first within the ministry, then publicly. Senior RZIM leaders and board members (whose names are not made public) now face pressure from within the ministry to demonstrate a new commitment to accountability.

"I think we need a total apology and total transparency," Max Baker-Hytch, an RZIM speaker who also teaches philosophy at Oxford University, told CT (Christianity Today). "I'm afraid we won't really admit to the corporate complicity and the toxic loyalty culture."

At an online all-staff meeting in mid-October, however, RZIM speaker Sam Allberry, who officiated at Zacharias's graveside service, asked why "ministry team mates" had been included in the official denial. They had not been consulted before leadership crafted the unsigned statement, denying the claims. "Why are you putting words in my mouth?" said Allberry, according to people who attended the meeting. "Frankly, I believe these women and find their allegations to be credible."

Others at RZIM, from people who keep the Atlanta headquarters running to top-level apologists, also started to speak out, persuaded by the reporting in CT and World magazine that the accusations were serious and credible.

Over the past three months, CT interviewed seven current and two former RZIM speakers and staff in five countries. CT has also reviewed more than a dozen internal documents and detailed notes of multiple meetings, which reveal growing frustration and escalating pressure as staff members attempted to force a full reckoning with what they see as an institutional failure. A number of ministry teammates believe the fault doesn't lie only with Zacharias, but also with the top ministry officials who supported a culture that allowed him to abuse women without any fear of being challenged and encouraged the casual dismissal of allegations against him.

Had Zacharias bitten the bullet, admitted his failure and left the organisation, he would not have compromised others and the Gospel. If the organisation had not been named after him, it would have separated the other members of the team from being covered in muck. If he had operated in a church he would have been subject to discipline, but he did not operate within a church. Zacharias operated an unaccountable para-church ministry. We all bear his shame. And note this also, heaven is watching everything we do.

Now the best advice I give you is as well as praying prayers each day, “deliver us from evil”, to assuage your conscience, you should give attendance to this matter, **“am I in an unequal yoke with anyone who will lead me into evil and compromise the Gospel of Christ spoken by me?”** Examine your conscience. Turn words into actions.

The Nazarite was a separation to God alone and you took it if you wanted to, by observing certain things, *Num 6:2 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When either **man or woman** shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate themselves unto the LORD:* It could be a man or a woman who took this vow.

He did so by abstaining from the grape. *Num 6:3 He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried. Num 6:4 All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk.* Also their hair grew wild and long, for the purpose of the vow. *Num 6:5 All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head: until the days be fulfilled, in the which he separateth himself unto the LORD, he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow.* They could not touch the dead either. *Num 6:6 All the days that he separateth himself unto the LORD he shall come at no dead body.*

Num 6:8 All the days of his separation he is holy unto the LORD. The restrictions were to show the personal holiness of the individual. His holiness and the separation were the same. But why pick these things to define holiness? I think that there is a separation to Christ here and any other reason for separation fades into insignificance. *Mat 26:27 And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; Mat 26:28 For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. Mat 26:29 But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.*

They gave up the fruits of the earthly vine in anticipation of the Heavenly and they were by Christ made Holy. The earthly distinctions of man and woman was also the hair, *1Co 11:14 Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? 1Co 11:15 But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering.* Hair was lost in eternity and they grew it solely for the Lord. And as for touching the earthly dead, the reason is obvious, that they were in a Kingdom of the living not the dead. *Mat 22:31 But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, Mat 22:32 I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.*

The Creation itself shouted out to man. *2Co 6:17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, 2Co 6:18 And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.* How was this achieved? *Lev 19:19 Ye shall keep my statutes. Thou shalt not let thy cattle gender with a diverse kind: thou shalt not sow thy field with mingled seed: neither shall a garment mingled of linen and woollen come upon thee.* You were reminded every day, in the daily round that you were a “separate” creature.

Matthew Henry observes,

God's providence extends itself to the smallest affairs, and his precepts do so, that even in them we may be in the fear of the Lord, as we are under his eye and care. Yet the tendency of these laws, which seem little, is such, that being found among the things of God's law, they are to be accounted great things. If we would prove ourselves to be God's people, we must have respect to his will and to his glory, and not to the vain fashions of the world. Even in putting on our garments, as in eating or in drinking, all must be done with a serious regard to preserve our own and others' purity in heart and actions. Our eye should be single, our heart simple, and our behaviour all of a piece.

When Abram separated from Lot, he was showing that the children of the promise have a different inheritance than the children of this world. Although the world's children appear to have Eden, it is soon a burnt wasteland.

9. What dreams may come

*Gen 13:14 And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art **northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:** Gen 13:15 **For all the land which thou seest,** to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. Gen 13:16 And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Gen 13:17 Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.*

Paul the Apostle speaks affectionately of Abraham. He speaks of him in the New Testament as the one to whom the promises were given. Paul does not chart a new course for the Christians and sail in a different direction to the Jews and Abram, but to the contrary, he sees all going in the same direction, Old Testament and New Testament saints, all one, *Heb 11:40 God having provided some better thing for us, that **they without us** should not be made perfect.* Abraham was so to speak, the head of The Dynasty, and he gives it to Christ.

The New Testament does not take Moses as an example of faith nor Aaron nor David, but goes back much further, before the encoding of the law. Back to a time when there were no churches, synagogues, temples or Jews, back to a time when religion was pure and undefiled.

It may seem strange that Paul speaks of Abraham and not Christ, but it is necessary to fit Christ into Historic Christianity and relate Him to the start of Christianity. Our faith must have a beginning and

this link, Abraham to Christ is it. In the genealogy of Christ sits Abraham, *Mat 1:1 The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Mat 1:2 Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren;* Luke's gospel does the same but goes back further to Adam.

Paul uses Abraham nineteen times in his letters, to illustrate the New Testament faith from the perspective of the Old Testament. He uses him to illustrate the great teaching of righteousness, or justification by faith alone. *Rom 4:2 For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. Rom 4:3 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.*

He uses him to show the blessings of Christ are upon the circumcision and the uncircumcision, the Jew and Gentile. *Rom 4:9 Cometh this blessedness then upon also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness..... Rom 4:12 And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised. Rom 4:13 For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith..... Rom 4:16 Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,*

Paul shows the teaching of election through Abraham's offspring and although he had other children, Isaac alone was called. *Rom 9:7 Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, **In Isaac shall thy seed be called.*** Isaac was the elect one, the chosen one.

Paul is of Abraham's seed and proud of it. *Rom 11:1 I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin..... 2Co 11:22 Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. **Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I.***

Those who have the faith of Abraham are the children of Abraham and that includes New Testament saints, *Gal 3:9 So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.* According to Paul the Gospel was not just for New Testament Christians, God preached the Gospel in the Old Testament. That means the Old Testament Saints were Christians. *Gal 3:7 Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.....Gal 3:8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, **preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.***

The great marvel that Paul proclaims is that Abraham's blessing comes upon us, not that our blessing comes upon him. *Gal 3:14 That **the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles** through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.*

Paul then shouts in a glorious triumph as the veil is cut away, the promises given to Abraham were given to Christ, *Gal 3:16 Now to **Abraham and his seed were the promises made.** He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to **thy seed, which is Christ.***

You see, says Paul, the promise was not given by the law, the inheritance was not given by law, the Jews did not get it through birth but promise. John the Baptist and Jesus say the same thing, *Luk 3:8 Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.....Joh 8:39 They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. Joh 8:40 But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham.*

Paul makes his point with an allegory using Abraham's life, showing that there are two covenants. *Gal 4:22 For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. Gal 4:23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Gal 4:24 Which things are an allegory: for these are the **two covenants**; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. Gal 4:25 For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to **Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.** Gal 4:26 But **Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.***

The first Covenant gendered bondage and this was Moses Covenant. Whoever looks to this first Covenant is doomed to servitude. The second Covenant is freedom for all who come under its wing, for it is the Covenant with Christ. It is also likened to the two Jerusalem's. One below, that is the earthly Jerusalem and one above, that is the heavenly Jerusalem. Jerusalem "which is now", or the Jerusalem on earth, ties men to bondage, to be slaves, whereas the "one above" is the free man's City.

I note that **Adam** is not held up as the father of the faithful or the seed of Christ. Abraham is life to us. *Heb 2:16 For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham..... Rom 4:16 Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all. Whereas Adam is likened to death, 1Co 15:22 For as **in Adam all die**, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.*

Abraham also illustrates that the Tithe was given before Levi, that Levi was inferior to Melchizedek and that Christ being a type of Melchizedek was superior to Levi, *Heb 7:1 For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; Heb 7:2 To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace; Heb 7:3 Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; **but made like unto the Son of God**; abideth a priest continually. Heb 7:4 Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils. Heb 7:5 And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham: Heb 7:6 But he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises. Heb 7:7 And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better.*

So according to Paul, Abraham is indeed great among men, possibly the greatest, but he gives way to Christ who is the greater by far. To him, gave Christ the land.

“For all the land which thou seest”. What does this mean? The land he saw with his eyes was a small part of “*eretz Israel*”, as it later became. He could only see the distant hills with his earthly eyes. When Christ was shown the world by the devil, it was all in a flash, *Luk 4:5 And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time*. This is a strange power of the devil who is limited to a single place at a single moment of time (not omnipresent like The Lord), but has the power to show the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.

I wonder whether Abraham was shown the actual earthly land or a vision of all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of history, looking to the future, looking to the end of time, when the faithful would be gathered in? *Gen 13:14 And the LORD said unto Abram, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: Gen 13:15 For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever*. Was this an earthly or heavenly promise?

It is quite clear that Abram looked for a godly city, *Heb 11:9 By faith he made his temporary home in the land that God had promised him, although a land inhabited by others, living merely in tents with Isaac and Jacob, who were to share the promise with him. Heb 11:10 For he was confidently looking forward to that city with the solid foundations, whose architect and builder is God*. Williams.

I think that this word from the Lord, encouraged Abram to see beyond the “now”, beyond the earth to heaven. It makes Abram carnal to consider that he only looked to this world for the fulfilment of this prophecy. Although this is not actually stated to be a dream or vision, that does not mean it was not. When the promise is reiterated, it certainly was in the context of a vision and dream. *Gen 15:12 And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him..... Gen 15:17 And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. Gen 15:18 In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates*.

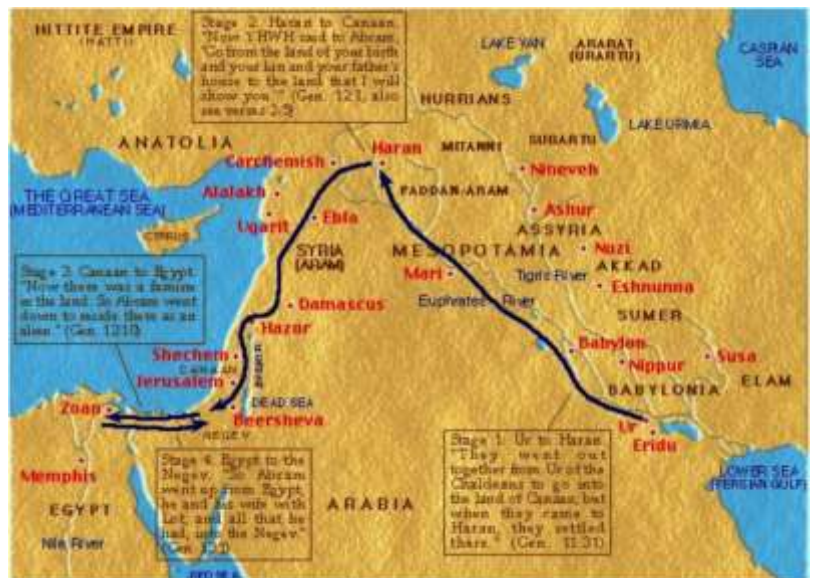


Figure 7 Abram's travels

The land of promise extends from Egypt to the Euphrates. It was all of the land that Abraham had journeyed through, from Ur of Chaldees, Haran at the northern end of the Euphrates, through Canaan to Egypt. But that was all the land that Abram physically saw.

I think this is an analogue for what he spiritually saw. With his eyes he had seen the world, albeit from Ur to Egypt.

The land of promise was in part “*eretz Israel*”, Canaan, the rest was “*from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates*”. In other words it was all of the land that Abraham had walked, from Ur to Haran, Shechem to Egypt. He had walked the boundary of his earthly inheritance and it was much bigger than Israel in Palestine. **The land of the promise is much, much bigger than Israel.** At the outer boundaries of the land were Egypt and Babylon, so called “The Great” Babylon. Outside of that boundary, the land of earthly promise, was Babylon, but that was the city that set itself against God and as yet is growing in power for a future time. Egypt and Babylon have a future role to play, for both are the scenes for captivity.

The birth of the Nation of Israel was out of the captivity in Egypt and the death of the Nation of Israel was going in to captivity in Babylon from which it never recovered. They were like the “bookends” for the history of the nation, Egypt and Babylon.

In between these “bookends” was the history of the nation of Israel, Abram’s earthly descendents. It had its ideals of religion set forth in the Tabernacle where the people followed as God led. The people soon stopped following and the religion decayed and became a shadow of its former self. God was rejected in favour of earthly kings and the nation spiralled down until the Lord had enough. They were finished as a nation but there was still the promise of a Deliverer, a Saviour who would rescue the godly remnant, **to inherit the kingdom of Abraham.**

As Paul says: *Rom 9:22 What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: Rom 9:23 And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Rom 9:24 Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?*



Figure 8 The promised land

10. Fellowship

Gen 13:14 And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: Gen 13:15 For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. Gen 13:16 And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Gen 13:17 Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee. Gen 13:18 Then Abram removed

his tent, and came and dwelt **in the oak of Mamre, which is in Hebron**, and built there an altar unto the LORD.

What exactly was the land given to Abram? It was not Israel as we know it, in fact Israel was unknown at that time. It isn't until later that the boundary is given and the land of the sons Jacob is called Israel but that too needs defining. We so often read back into the Bible what is not there. We assume from our present knowledge that "Israel" existed, but it did not.

We also have different views of what constitutes Israel. The boundaries of "Israel" are constantly moving from the day they entered the land, through Solomon's growing empire, contracting afterwards, to the split kingdoms of Judah and Israel, to the post exilic land consisting of

Jerusalem, to the limited land of the Maccabees, to the modern day "eretz Israel", land of Israel. **Israel must be defined by the time that you are speaking of it.** If you are talking of it in Solomon's time it has different boundaries to Jesus' day. Modern Israel has been changing by the decade.

Another point to note is that Abram spent most of his life in a very small area of the land, much smaller than that which was occupied in Joshua's day. In fact apart from the journey into the land, going down to Egypt and rescuing Lot, Abram spent his time in an area much the size of Berkshire (UK) where we live. He did not roam far and wide and he certainly did not attempt to draw a boundary around his land. The localised famine that occurred later, did not result in a trip to Egypt, but to Gerar, 28 miles south of Hebron, where he sojourned with Abimelech. Such a local famine suggests an act of providence in his life rather than climate change.

Was the land given to Abram a shadow land, an earthly land with a heavenly meaning, a heavenly reality? Was its design to show Abraham what he could only see by faith? Was the City, whose builder and maker was Almighty God only capable of being seen by the things that were made? *Heb 11:3 By faith we understand the ages to have been framed by the Word of God, so that the things seen should not come into being out of things that appear.* LITV. The things which we see are not brought into existence by the things that exist in this realm. The City of God, the reality, the unseen reality, is brought to our senses by the things which appear. That City only exists here, in this world in shadows and dust.



Figure 9 Israel (2021) compared with UK

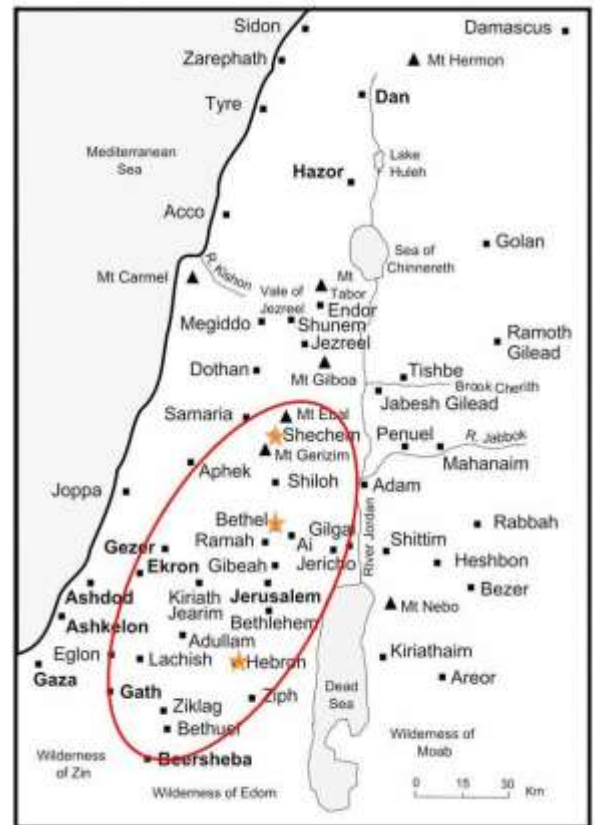


Figure 10 Abram's Promised Land on earth

And what of that Great City, Jerusalem? It was unknown to Abram by that name at that time. If it were known that there was such a place, such a city, they had time to go to it, but they did not, they kept going to the heavenly City, they stretched forward to it, *Heb 11:15 And truly if they remembered that from which they came out, they had time to return. Heb 11:16 But now they stretch forth to a better, that is, a heavenly land. Therefore, God is not ashamed of them, for Him to be called their God; for He **prepared a city for them***. On earth they could go back to where they came from but they did not, they went on to God's City.

This is in accord with Christ's words to the disciples, *Joh 14:2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. Joh 14:3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also*.

Paul says that Abraham is our Father, the Old Testament and New Testament Father of the faithful, *Rom 4:15 Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression. Rom 4:16 Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; **who is the father of us all**, Rom 4:17 (As it is written, **I have made thee a father of many nations**,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were. Rom 4:18 Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become **the father of many nations**, according to that which was spoken, **So shall thy seed be***.

We New Testament Christians are so to speak, sons and daughters of Abraham, together with the faithful of the Older Testament and you would think we should live in the same faith as Abraham. But do we have Abraham's faith? So many are no different to those Jews who claimed Abraham as their father, but were really of their father the devil, and their modern counterparts are no different. Those are carnal "Christians" who look for an earthly city, who look for an earthly inheritance, who seek after an Israel established on the heights of Canaan, who look for a Kingdom on earth whereas Abraham their father did not.

Abraham is so different in his aspirations than his modern counterpart in the Church. He had no place on earth to call home, he dwelt in a tent not in a permanent building, he looked forward to a city built by God. *Heb 9:11 But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; He rejoiced to see Christ's day but he had never seen earthly Jerusalem. He had no Tabernacle, no Temple, only an altar of stone. His worship was simple yet profound, and he had more communion with God than we ever have. Where do we get these strange ideas about the nature of the Kingdom, Temple and City of God which Abraham never had? There is only one entity I can think of that feeds the lie, the devil*.

Millennia ago, Abraham went through many cities, Shechem, Bethel and Egypt. Yes, Egypt is like a city, *Rev 11:8 And their bodies will be on the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom, and Egypt, where our Lord was crucified*. He did not settle there, but went back to the land of promise, to Hebron. Hebron means "fellowship" and this fellowship was with Christ, *1Jn 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: 1Jn 1:7 But*

if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

I think we miss out because we do not have the facility with the language. To the Hebrew ear, Abram would have moved to the town called “Fellowship”, which in his language was “Hebron”. He understood the meaning of it, where as we see the cold letters spelling out Hebron. I will use the word “Fellowship” instead of Hebron.

After his separation from Lot, Abram moved to Fellowship where he dwelt in his tent. Hebron is a city of the modern West Bank, south-southwest of Jerusalem. It is sacred to both Jews and Muslims as the home and burial place of Abraham and (to Jews) as King David's capital for seven years. At that time the area was known as Mamre and was associated with the Amorites. Abram moved his tent and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre and there he built an altar to Jehovah. Mamre means “strength” or “fatness” so Abram dwelt in Fellowship under Fatness.

The region is over 3,000 feet above sea level and fifteen miles west of the Dead Sea. The surrounding area has an abundant water supply and its rich soil is excellent for agriculture. According to archaeological research the site has been occupied almost continuously since about 3300 B.C. Abram did not found the city, and it already had many Hittites living in it, *Gen 23:1 And Sarah was an hundred and seven and twenty years old: these were the years of the life of Sarah. Gen 23:2 And Sarah died in Kirjatharba; the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan: and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her. Gen 23:3 And Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spake unto the sons of Heth, saying, Gen 23:4 I am a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a buryingplace with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight. Gen 23:10 And Ephron dwelt among the children of Heth: and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the audience of the children of Heth, even of all that went in at the gate of his city, saying, Gen 23:11 Nay, my lord, hear me: the field give I thee, and the cave that is therein, I give it thee; in the presence of the sons of my people give I it thee: bury thy dead.* Perhaps the Hittites offered him some protection against the Canaanites?

This town called Fellowship had some illustrious names associated with its future and some historic events unfold themselves. When God would appear to Abram, he would build an altar, signifying his consecration to God. Specifically, Abram built three altars in three places, **Shechem** (Gen. 12:6-7), **Bethel** (Gen. 12:8), and **Hebron** (Gen. 13:18). These three places represent the good land which God promised to Abram and they are full of spiritual significance.

Abram remained at Mamre until after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham purchased a field with a burial plot inside a nearby cave. Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah and Jacob and Leah were buried there. Fellowship underwent a name change, *Jos 14:15 And the name of Hebron before was Kirjatharba; which Arba was a great man among the Anakims. And the land had rest from war.*

This city became the property of Caleb, a mighty man, one of the two men who were bold enough to go up against the Canaanites and as a result he survived the wilderness experience, *Jos 14:13 And Joshua blessed him, and gave unto Caleb the son of Jephunneh Hebron for an inheritance. Jos 14:14 Hebron therefore became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite unto this day,*

because that he wholly followed the LORD God of Israel. Jos 14:15 And the name of Hebron before was Kirjatharba; which Arba was a great man among the Anakims. And the land had rest from war. Caleb was of the tribe of Judah.

It became a city of refuge. The city of refuge was administered by the son's of Aaron. Jos 21:13 Thus they gave to the children of Aaron the priest Hebron with her suburbs, to be a city of refuge for the slayer; and Libnah with her suburbs.

*"Fellowship" was one of three cities of refuge on the west bank of the Jordan. Jos 20:7 And they appointed **Kedesh** in Galilee in mount Naphtali, and **Shechem** in mount Ephraim, and Kirjatharba, which is **Hebron**, in the mountain of Judah. Jos 20:8 And on the other side Jordan by Jericho eastward, they assigned **Bezer** in the wilderness upon the plain out of the tribe of Reuben, and **Ramoth** in Gilead out of the tribe of Gad, and **Golan** in Bashan out of the tribe of Manasseh. Jos 20:9 These were the cities appointed for all the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them, that whosoever killeth any person at unawares might flee thither, and not die by the hand of the avenger of blood, until he stood before the congregation. Jos 21:11 And they gave them the city of Arba the father of Anak, which city is Hebron, in the hill country of Judah, with the suburbs thereof round about it.*

The city of "Fellowship" became a city of David, 2Sa 2:11 And the time that David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months..... 1Ch 29:27 And the time that he reigned over Israel was forty years; seven years reigned he in Hebron, and thirty and three years reigned he in Jerusalem.

It was the city taken over by David's son Absalom from where he launched his rebellion. 2Sa 15:8 For thy servant vowed a vow while I abode at Geshur in Syria, saying, If the LORD shall bring me again indeed to Jerusalem, then I will serve the LORD. 2Sa 15:9 And the king said unto him, Go in peace. So he arose, and went to Hebron. 2Sa 15:10 But Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, As soon as ye hear the sound of the trumpet, then ye shall say, Absalom reigneth in Hebron. 2Sa 15:11 And with Absalom went two hundred men out of Jerusalem, that were called; and they went in their simplicity, and they knew not any thing. 2Sa 15:12 And Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counsellor, from his city, even from Giloh, while he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom.

With all of the history associated with Hebron you might have thought that it would become the capital city of Israel. You might have seen another contender for the capital in Shechem, which played host to so many great events in the History of the Nation and where Jesus ministered to the woman at the well, although there is no record that Jesus went to Hebron. And despite this narrative of history, Jerusalem, the City of the Jebusites is made the capital. It is also among the last taken in conquest by the Israelites, Jdg 1:21 And the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites that inhabited Jerusalem; but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem unto this day.



Figure 11 The cities of refuge

11. Abraham's contemporaries

Do you see the contemporary's that Abram meets along the way of life or do you just view his life in isolation? There were lots of other people that influenced him and interacted with him and I would like to examine these, because they play a part in the later history of the Jews. To do so we go back in time to Genesis chapter 10. You may wonder why the scripture bothered to record all the generations of Noah but there was a purpose. It was to show the fulfilment of Noah's curse, among other things. *Gen 9:24 And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. Gen 9:25 And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. Gen 9:26 And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. Gen 9:27 God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.*

Abram moved through earthly Canaan and all the land was going to be his but who would be displaced for him to get it?



Figure 12 The sons of Noah

Gen 10:6 And the sons of **Ham**; **Cush**, and **Mizraim**, and **Phut**, and **Canaan**. Gen 10:7 And the sons of **Cush**; Seba, and Havilah, and Sabtah, and Raamah, and Sabtechah: and the sons of Raamah; Sheba, and Dedan.

Gen 10:8 And **Cush** begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth. Gen 10:9 He was a mighty hunter before the LORD: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD. Gen 10:10 And the beginning of his kingdom was **Babel**, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. Gen 10:11 Out of that land went forth Asshur, and builded Nineveh, and the city Rehoboth, and Calah, Gen 10:12 And Resen between Nineveh and Calah: the same is a great city.

Gen 10:13 And **Mizraim** begat Ludim, and Ananim, and Lehabim, and Naphtuhim, Gen 10:14 And Pathrusim, and Casluhim, (out of whom came **Philistim**), and Caphtorim.

Gen 10:15 And **Canaan** begat **Sidon** his firstborn, and **Heth**, Gen 10:16 And the **Jebusite**, and the **Amorite**, and the **Girgashite**, Gen 10:17 And the **Hivite**, and the Arkite, and the Sinite, Gen 10:18 And the Arvadite, and the Zemarite, and the Hamathite: and afterward were the families of the Canaanites spread abroad. Gen 10:19 And the border of the Canaanites was from **Sidon**, as thou comest to Gerar, unto Gaza; as thou goest, unto Sodom, and Gomorrah, and Admah, and Zeboim, even unto Lasha.

Why is there silence after writing these genealogies, silence for another 2,000 years or so? Not a peep from scripture from the laying down of these names until Abram. Did nothing happen in those intervening years? I think that “things” happened and that they were important but not enough to

be reported. Things like the growth of the nations of the earth, slowly maturing and ripening, coming to a point where they will be turned fully against God. Things like the development of evil and idolatry to the point of conflict with God. *Gen 15:14 And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. Gen 15:15 And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. Gen 15:16 But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.*

People were saved in that period, people like Noah, people like Melchizedek and his followers, but it was not salvation to a nation state, a chosen people, it was salvation to individuals. Christ offered salvation to individuals, but to Abraham it was to a Nation.

These were the embryonic nations that would fight against Israel in the years to come, but for now they are the contemporaries of Abram and it was Abram who dwelt in their land. They were not just contemporary with him but were even his friends. It does not appear that there was much conflict in that distant past as there were enough resources for all but that was changing. The famine that drove Abram to Egypt, the conflict between the herdsmen of Lot and Abram (and incidentally the Canaanite and Perizite who might be mentioned as competing needs), *Gen 13:7 And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land*). His well was also taken by the Philistines, *Gen 21:25 And Abraham reproved Abimelech because of a well of water, which Abimelech's servants had violently taken away.*

Competition and shortages led to people guarding their resources and fighting over them. This would have led to polarising families and clans, leading them towards isolation and occasional war. But in the time of Abram there was a community living together and trade supporting one another (witness the trade between the Indus valley, Sumer and Egypt). So for now Abram was at peace with his neighbours.

We see the tribes of Ham living with Abram in peace or rather the children of Ham. There were the Perizzites, *Gen 13:7 and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land*. There were the Hittites. *Gen 23:10 And Ephron dwelt among the children of Heth: and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the audience of the children of Heth, even of all that went in at the gate of his city.*

There were the Amorites who were good friends. *Gen 14:13 And there came one that had escaped, and told Abram the Hebrew; for he dwelt in the plain of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol, and brother of Aner: and these were confederate with Abram.*

There was Melchizedek a Jebusite from Salem (before it was known as Jerusalem). *Gen 14:18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God.*

There were the Philistines, *Gen 20:2 And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah..... Gen 26:1 And there was a famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went unto Abimelech king of the Philistines unto Gerar.* This I presume is the son of Abimelech, called after his father Abimelech.

God gave all these lands, now in a relative peace, to Abram and he was to take them from his neighbours by Divine decree. *Gen 15:18 In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: Gen 15:19 The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, Gen 15:20 And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, Gen 15:21 And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites. Gen 14:1 And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of nations; Gen 14:2 That these made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, which is Zoar.*

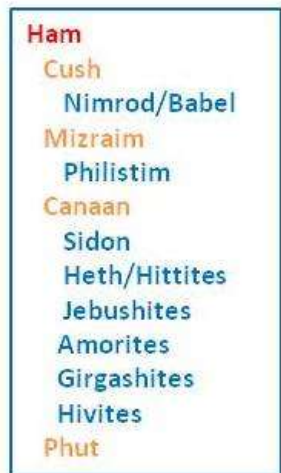


Figure 13 The sons of Ham

In the wider Earth we have the rising of Kings and Kingdoms. The people from Babylon were beginning to flex their muscles and we should not forget this. Alongside the history of the Bible is the history of the world. There was the Mesopotamian civilisation, the Egyptian civilisation, the Indus Valley civilisation, the Chinese civilisation, the Aegean civilisation, the Nubian civilisation, the Inca civilisation, all from the dispersion at Babel. In time they would come to play their part in the conflict with Abraham's seed.

In time these nations would all become the enemies of Israel, but why did they become enemies? It was because these nations were at war with God, *Exo 23:20 Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Exo 23:21 Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in him. Exo 23:22 But if thou shalt indeed obey his voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries. Exo 23:23 For mine Angel shall go before thee, and bring thee in unto the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites: and I will cut them off. Exo 23:24 Thou shalt not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do after their works: but thou shalt utterly overthrow them, and quite break down their images. Exo 23:25 And ye shall serve the LORD your God, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee. Exo 23:26 There shall nothing cast their young, nor be barren, in thy land: the number of thy days I will fulfil. Exo 23:27 I will send my fear before thee, and will destroy all the people to whom thou shalt come, and I will make all thine enemies turn their backs unto thee. Exo 23:28 And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee. Exo 23:29 I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee. Exo 23:30 By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land. Exo 23:31 And I will set thy bounds from the Red sea even unto the sea of the Philistines, and from the desert unto the river: for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand; and thou shalt drive them out before thee. Exo 23:32 Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor with their gods. Exo 23:33 They shall not dwell in thy land, lest they make thee sin against me: for if thou serve their gods, it will surely be a snare unto thee.*

When the children of Jacob, 'aka' the children of Israel, are finally released from Egypt, it is the end of a period of bondage, *Gen 15:13 And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a*

stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; Dr Gill explains:

... this term "four hundred years" is not to be joined either with the word "afflict" or "serve"; for their hard servitude and severe affliction did not last long, but a few years at most; but with the phrase, "a stranger in a land not theirs"; and the rest is to be included in a parenthesis thus, and "thy seed shall be a stranger in the land not theirs (and shall serve them, and they shall afflict them) four hundred years"; so long they should be strangers and sojourners, as **they were partly in the land of Canaan, and partly in the land of Egypt**, neither of which were in their own land, however not in possession; within which space of time they would be in a state of subjection and servitude, and be greatly afflicted and oppressed, as they were particularly by the Egyptians before their deliverance from them, see Exo 1:11.

These four hundred years, as before observed, are to be reckoned from the birth of Isaac to the Israelites going out of Egypt. Isaac was sixty years of age when Jacob was born, and Jacob when he went down into Egypt was one hundred and thirty, which make one hundred and ninety; and the Israelites were in Egypt two hundred and ten years, which complete the sum of four hundred: according to Eusebius, there were four hundred and five years from the birth of Isaac to the Exodus of Israel; but the round number is only given, as is very usual; and though the sojourning of the Israelites is said to be four hundred and thirty years, (Exo 12:40) this takes in the sojourning of Abram in that land, who entered into it sixty five years before the birth of Isaac, which added to four hundred and five, the sum total is four hundred and thirty; for Abram was seventy five years of age when he left Haran and went to Canaan, and Isaac was born when he was an hundred years old.

After this period of captivity the judgement of Canaan begins. We may consider it a signal providence that the people did go into captivity. In that state of oppression they were spared from the idolatry of the Canaanites, albeit oppressed in other ways. Canaan beckoned, a land flowing with milk and honey. *Num 13:23 And they came unto the brook of Eshcol, and cut down from thence a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bare it between two upon a staff; and they brought of the pomegranates, and of the figs.*

It was no easy task but they had the Lord with them however because of unbelief they would wait another 38 years, until the "unbelief" had died out from the people. *Exo 33:2 And I will send an angel before thee; and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite: Exo 33:3 Unto a land flowing with milk and honey: for I will not go up in the midst of thee; for thou art a stiffnecked people: lest I consume thee in the way.*

After the judgement of Canaan comes the judgement of Israel and following that comes the judgement on the nations, until the "stone carved without hands" should come and smash the declining Empires. All it seems are doomed but out of every age comes a remnant which shall be saved for a greater Kingdom, the Kingdom of Heaven.

12. Abraham the Hunter

Gen 14:2 That **these made war** with Bera king of Sodom. This is first occurrence of the word “war” in the Bible.

The last war is the war with Christ, of which this war shows similarities. Rev 19:19 **And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army.** Rev 19:20 **And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.** Rev 19:21 **And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.** Christ takes on the armies of the earth and is victorious just as Abram took on the Babylonians.

When Lot is taken it did not take Abram long to get a small army together and they were trained men. Abram was expecting trouble. Gen 14:1 **And it came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of *Shinar*, Arioch king of *Ellasar*, Chedorlaomer king of *Elam*, and Tidal king of *nations*;** Gen 14:2 **That *these made war* with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, which is Zoar.** Gen 14:3 **All these were joined together in the vale of Siddim, which is the salt sea.** Four Kings against five.



Figure 14 Where the 4 kings came from

Why and when did they go to war? There may have been economic pressures possibly due to famine. They would have gone to war in the springtime, 2Sa 11:1 **And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem.**

When the rains were over and there was grass in the fields and fruit on the trees and ripe corn, and so food for horses and men, they went to war. This month was called Nisan, from מִנִּי, the military banners then erected; the Romans called it Martius, we call it March, from Mars, the god of war.

How many persons did Abram rescue? That depends on the size of the cities of the plain. A good way to get of size is to go to the graveyards. This is from

“Biblical Archaeology”: Sodom and Gomorrah by Leibel Reznick:

Current estimates of the number of bodies occupying the cemetery of Bab edh-Dhra is about a half million! Pottery shards found with the skeletal remains indicate that approximately 3,000,000 pottery vessels were used in conjunction with the burials. Other funerary items include clay figurines of goddesses, wooden staffs, sandals and reed baskets, some still containing food remains. The great number of corpses in a single burial ground is evidence of a major population. But this is only the beginning.



Figure 15 Cities of the plain

Significantly, some forms of the pottery, jewellery, and cylinder seal impressions show a distinct Mesopotamian influence. This bolsters the Biblical connection between the Dead Sea area and Mesopotamia.

A rather obscure branch of archaeology is known as paleoethnobotany. This study examines traces of food items used by ancient cultures in order to get a perspective of the culture's agriculture and diet. Paleoethnobotanists found in Bab edh-Dhra traces of wheat, barley, dates, plums, peaches, grapes, figs, pistachio nuts, almonds, olives, pine nuts, lentils, chick peas, pumpkin, flax seed, and watermelon. It was a gourmand's delight. The healthy diet manifested itself in the physique of the inhabitants: skeletal remains indicate that a height of 5'9"-6'4" was quite normal. This is a rather tall figure for such an ancient culture.

Between 1973 and 1979, four more "cities" to the south of Bab edh-Dhra were found. Their Arabic names are Numeira, Safi, Feifa, and Khanazir. The surrounding area has been thoroughly explored and no other cities have been found, only these five. **The five cities**, a few miles apart from each other, are almost in a straight line going from north to south.

Numeira was excavated for two seasons and the foundations of a few homes were uncovered. Perhaps the most interesting find was the remains of a winery with 4000-year-old whole grapes still there, preserved by the arid desert climate. In latter years Moses referred to the vineyards of Sodom, *Deu 32:32 For their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah: their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter.*

The other three "cities" of the area have yet to be excavated. Surrounding the archaeological ruins of Safi is an Early Bronze cemetery which rivals the size of Bab edh-Dhra. About nine miles south of Safi is the next of the five cities, Feifa. A cemetery has been found there too. The burial grounds of Feifa are similar in size to that of Bab edh-Dhra and Safi. As noted above, the cemetery of Bab edh-Dhra is reported to contain the remains of 500,000 individuals. The cemetery in Safi seems to hold the same number of corpses, another 500,000. The grounds of Feifa hold another 500,000. The cemeteries of Numeira and Khanazir have yet to be located; however, the known number of burials in this relatively small area of the Dead Sea Desert, 1,500,000 bodies, indicates that this was once a thriving, heavily populated area. Indeed, it does seem to be incredible, yet the evidence is there. Based on this dating of the pottery of the grave goods in Bab edh-Dhra, it seems that this city existed for about 1,000 years. Numeira, on the other hand, existed for a very short span of time, certainly less than 100 years. The Talmud says that Sodom existed for a mere 52 years. This would make Numeira a likely candidate for Sodom.

The estimated size of these cities based upon the cemeteries, at an annual death rate of 4% of the population, would give a size of about 125,000 souls for Sodom. (125,000 (population) x 0.04 (death

rate) x 100 (years of existence) = 500,000 burials). The purpose in giving this number is to show the population statistics and to get an idea of the number taken prisoner.

Estimating prisoners for the captivity of Judah, archaeological excavations and surveys have enabled the population of Judah, before the Babylonian destruction to be calculated with a high degree of confidence. It was approximately 75,000. Taking the different Biblical numbers of exiles at their highest, 20,000, this would mean that only about 25% of the population had been deported to Babylon, with the remaining 75% staying in Judah. Although Jerusalem was destroyed and depopulated, with large parts of the city remaining in ruins for 150 years, numerous other settlements in Judah continued to be inhabited, with no signs of disruption visible in archaeological studies.

The choice of the Jerusalem captives, who were taken captive, was interesting. *Dan 1:1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it. Dan 1:2 And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God: which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god. Dan 1:3 And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, **that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes;***

Nebuchadnezzar chose the “intellectual” capital of the nation of Israel for prisoners. It was a cultural lobotomy, and he stripped the nation of its brain power, thus rendering Judah of little importance. However, by keeping the rulers and leaders alive he enhanced Babylon’s power. I think the four kings had a similar motive. The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were subjugated after rebellion by taking captive their intellectual wealth captive. They were not just slaves but intellectual slaves. From an economic perspective, why would you take the old, infirm, non-productive, rebellious, prisoners captive? You only have to feed them and get very little from them.

The captivity of Lot has echoes of the Babylonian captivity. Babylon featured in both. Rebellion started the conflict. Restoration was the outcome.

I estimate that the prisoner total by the five kings ran into tens of thousands of people. The huge baggage train would have stretched for miles. *Gen 14:12 And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed. Gen 14:13 And there came one that had escaped, and told **Abram the Hebrew;** for he dwelt in the plain of **Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol, and brother of Aner: and these were confederate with Abram.** Gen 14:14 And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed **his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan.***

It is questionable whether Abraham would have been involved in this war if Lot had not been captured. It is a war between the Mesopotamians and the Canaanites and Abram rides forth and rescues him. He hunts them down and “slaughters” them. We may tend to side towards the Kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim and Zoar, who were Canaanites, because they were with Lot, but they are just as bad as the squabbling Babylonians. The evil in their cities of Sodom and Gomorrah was coming before God and judgement was looming.

Abram did not go into Canaan as a pacifist. God had promised him the land, as it were, a token of heaven, but he was going to have to claim it and it seems he would have to claim it by force. He did not walk into a land, where the table was laid for tea and have nothing to do. Like their descendants they would fight for it. *Num 13:30 And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it. Num 13:31 But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we. Num 13:32 And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. Num 13:33 And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.*

To those who think that Christianity is a one way street with God giving all, think again. He gives redemption, He fights for us, we are saved by Him, but we have a fight on our hands and whosoever will not engage the enemy will not inherit the land. *Eph 6:12 We are not fighting against humans. We are fighting against forces and authorities and against rulers of darkness and powers in the spiritual world.* CEV.

In order to be successful Abram trained the men of his household. They were no rabble but disciplined soldiers. They would have spent time every day, honing their skills such that one man would be as a thousand men, *Jos 23:9 For the LORD hath driven out from before you great nations and strong: but as for you, no man hath been able to stand before you unto this day. Jos 23:10 One man of you shall chase a thousand: for the LORD your God, he it is that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you.* This was how Abram's small band of 318 men and his Amorite confederates would have pursued the robber armies of Chedorlaomer.

Why did Abram not use this protection force when he went to Egypt the first time? It was there with him but he chose not to use it, probably because it was the Lord's idea to use plagues on Pharaoh's house, not men. Likewise with Abimelech, where again Abram says that Sarah is his sister, and God plagued Abimelech and Abram intercedes for him. *Gen 20:17 So Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children. Gen 20:18 For the LORD had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah Abraham's wife.* This happened after he defeated the armies of Chedorlaomer, so the mighty men did not get involved in this.

Another first use of a word occurs in Genesis chapter 14, *Gen 14:13 And there came one that had escaped, and told Abram the Hebrew; for he dwelt in the plain of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol, and brother of Aner: and these were confederate with Abram.* It is the first occurrence of the word "Hebrew" and implies a certain ethnicity to Abram. It distinguishes him from the people amongst whom he lived. Were these the Habiru?

The Habiru first became known to historians with the publication of the Amarna letters at the end of the 19th century. Since that time the available sources of information on them in Sumerian, Akkadian, Hittite, Ugaritic, and Egyptian, have increased to almost 200 documents. These sources span at least seven centuries and concern the geographical area along the Fertile Crescent from

Lower Mesopotamia to Egypt. The earliest certain reference to the Habiru is from Anatolia in the 19th century B.C. the latest from Egypt in the middle of the 12th century B.C. The Habiru must therefore have existed during the second millennium B.C. Were the Habiru and the Hebrews one and the same? It is not known for sure and it makes little difference to our narrative. Whatever the origin, it is here that the Hebrews become a Dynasty. They are the same as Jews, *Jer 34:9 That every man should let his manservant, and every man his maidservant, being an **Hebrew or an Hebrewess**, go free; that none should serve himself of them, to wit, of a **Jew** his brother.*

Abram the Hebrew did not fight alone. *Gen 14:13 And there came one that had escaped, and told Abram the Hebrew; for he dwelt in the plain of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol, and brother of Aner: and these were **confederate** with Abram.* These were in covenant (confederate) with Abram; or "were masters" or "authors of a covenant" with him;

“they had entered into a league to defend one another, their persons and properties, from the insults of invaders and tyrants, or thieves and robbers: and it may be lawful to form such leagues with irreligious persons on such accounts, **where there is no prohibition from God, as there was none as yet, though there afterwards was one; and the Israelites, were forbid to make covenants with the Canaanites, but that was after they were drove out of the land for their sins, Deu7:1; besides, it is not improbable that these men were religious men, and worshipped the same God with Abram, for such there were among the Canaanitish princes, of which Melchizedek, after spoken of, is an instance; and as yet the sin of the Amorites was not full, of which tribe or nation these men were.**” Dr Gill.

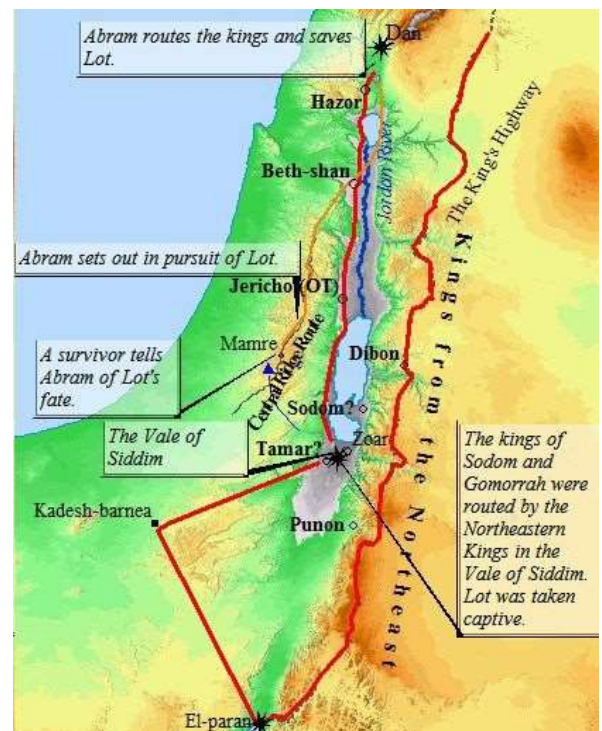


Figure 16 The pursuit of the kings

The task force sets off to get the captives back, *Gen 14:14 And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan. Gen 14:15 And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus.*

It was perhaps when he was at Damascus Abram picked up the steward Eliezer, who became his heir, but more of that later. *Gen 15:2 And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?*

13. Choose your friends carefully (part 1)

Gen 14:14 And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan. Gen 14:15 And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus. Gen 14:16 And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people.

The task confronting Abram is dismissed in three verses of Scripture and we may be led to think it was a simple task to rescue his nephew but I do not think it was. It was a big undertaking, like David getting his wives back, which is given in more detail.

*1Sa 30:8 And David enquired at the LORD, saying, Shall I pursue after this troop? shall I overtake them? And he answered him, Pursue: for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all. 1Sa 30:9 So David went, he and the six hundred men that were with him, and came to the brook Besor, where those that were left behind stayed. 1Sa 30:10 But David pursued, he and four hundred men: for two hundred abode behind, which were so faint that they could not go over the brook Besor. 1Sa 30:11 And they found an Egyptian in the field, and brought him to David, and gave him bread, and he did eat; and they made him drink water; 1Sa 30:12 And they gave him a piece of a cake of figs, and two clusters of raisins: and when he had eaten, his spirit came again to him: for he had eaten no bread, nor drunk any water, three days and three nights. 1Sa 30:13 And David said unto him, To whom belondest thou? and whence art thou? And he said, I am a young man of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite; and my master left me, because three days ago I fell sick. 1Sa 30:14 We made an invasion upon the south of the Cherethites, and upon the coast which belongeth to Judah, and upon the south of Caleb; and we burned Ziklag with fire. 1Sa 30:15 And David said to him, Canst thou bring me down to this company? And he said, Swear unto me by God, that thou wilt neither kill me, nor deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will bring thee down to this company. 1Sa 30:16 And when he had brought him down, **behold, they were spread abroad upon all the earth, eating and drinking, and dancing, because of all the great spoil that they had taken out of the land of the Philistines, and out of the land of Judah. 1Sa 30:17 And David smote them from the twilight even unto the evening of the next day: and there escaped not a man of them, save four hundred young men, which rode upon camels, and fled. 1Sa 30:18 And David recovered all that the Amalekites had carried away: and David rescued his two wives. 1Sa 30:19 And there was nothing lacking to them, neither small nor great, neither sons nor daughters, neither spoil, nor any thing that they had taken to them: David recovered all.***

It is no understatement to say the “baggage trains” were large. They would stretch for miles. To illustrate just how long these wagon trains can be, I turn to the American Civil War. The Union General Sherman said that, as a rule, each of his corps (20,000 to 45,000 men) needed a required minimum of 600 wagons to haul supplies if operating for 20 days without re-supply. With the average of three corps per army and taking into the account the fact that Army wagons are each ten feet long, it can be calculated that **the wagon train** of the Army of the Tennessee - if put end to end - stretched for nearly 3.5 miles. And that is with an average number of corps and the average number of wagons on a typical campaign. Add onto this the troops. A corps includes two to five divisions

with anywhere between 20,000 and 45,000 soldiers, so this, wagons and troops could stretch for 10 to 14 miles.

Could relatively few men take on an Army like Abram did? Again using the analogy of the American Civil War, we see that it is possible. A Confederate cavalry commander in the American Civil War was James Ewell Brown "Jeb" Stuart. Jeb Stuart's most celebrated act was his encirclement of the Union General George McClellan's Army of the Potomac, in June of 1862. Newly appointed commander of the Army of Northern Virginia Robert E. Lee and Jeb Stuart devised the plan to circle around McClellan and gather intelligence. The aggressive strategy stemmed from the knowledge that McClellan was hesitant to attack the Confederate troops, which he believed to be incredibly large in size and powerful in strength.

In a message to Stuart on June 11, 1862, Lee expressed caution, stating that he should be careful not "to hazard unnecessarily your command or to attempt what your judgment may not approve but be content to accomplish all the good you can without feeling it necessary to obtain all that might be desired." The letter from Lee to Stuart stressed the importance of the reconnaissance mission and the need for discretion.

Stuart saddled his troops, consisting of 1,200 men from the first, fourth, and ninth Virginia Cavalry, and the Jeff Davis Legion, on June 12, 1862, to determine if the Army of the Potomac occupied the land between the Chickahominy and Totopotomy Rivers. The value of the land between both rivers was essential for the Confederacy and the Union. During the reconnaissance mission ordered by Lee, Stuart realized that his position had been discovered, forcing him to find an alternate route back to Richmond. The alternate route led Stuart's infamous ride around McClellan's troops. Historian James McPherson stated, Stuart gained fame from this event as well as "great personal satisfaction from the enterprise, for one of the opposing cavalry commanders was his father-in-law, Philip St. George Cooke."

Stuart's mission resulted in his troops spending four days behind enemy lines in which they covered over 100 miles. The troops captured 165 prisoners as well as 260 mules. Stuart fulfilled the desires of Lee, who stated in his letter, the importance of "gaining intelligence of his operations, communications, &c., of driving in his foraging parties, and securing such grain, cattle, &c., for ourselves as you can make arrangements to have driven in." After the successful raid commenced, Stuart felt that he had the capability to outride and outfight any Union cavalryman, boosting

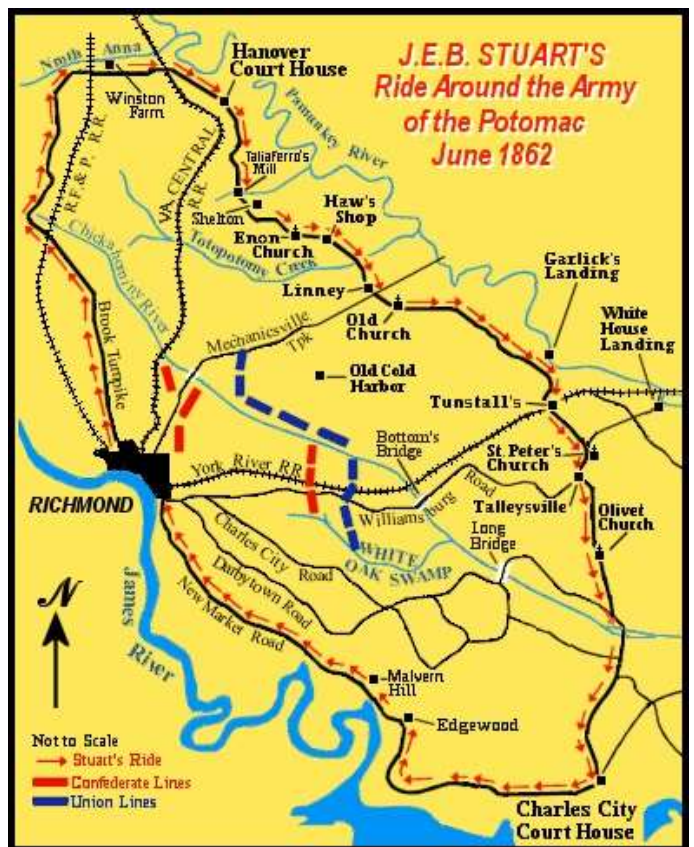


Figure 17 The ride around the army of the Potomac

Southern morale even more. The intelligence that Stuart gathered allowed Lee to attack at Mechanicsville, which was the first of the Seven Days' battles, and contributed in the failure of McClellan's Peninsula campaign.

So on horseback or camel, Abram's small detachment could have defeated a much larger Army spread over a large area by harrying them and defeating them piecemeal. I use these illustrations to show that it was possible although not much is said on the matter.

More is said about the victorious return of Abram. We immediately focus on the enigmatic character of Melchizedek but forget there is another person Abram confronts, namely Bera the king of Sodom. We read of him too quickly and pass on to consider Melchizedek and miss this confrontation. There were two kings. *Gen 14:17 And the king of Sodom went out to meet him after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him, at the valley of Shaveh, which is the king's dale. Gen 14:18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God.* The kings could not be more different in character.

Abram had defeated his enemy Chederlaormer et al. and rescued his nephew, so to the victor the spoils of war. Abram had it all by right of victory and so it was his to dispose of. Then the barefaced cheek of Bera comes to the fore. *Gen 14:21 And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself.* What a cheek. The defeated king of Sodom says that Abram the Victor can keep the goods. What planet is this upstart from, this upstart who has lost everything, now reduced to a nonentity, acting as if he is magnanimously giving Abram a gift? Abram could have ignored this "has been", told him where to go, somewhere very warm, but he does not and is very gracious to him.

Why is he gracious? He is gracious because Bera wants the persons and Abram sees that these people are not worth having, as he had already seen. *Gen 13:12 Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom. Gen 13:13 But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly.* In a very short time, these inhabitants of the land will be ripe for judgement and Abram is having nothing to do with them. Bera king of the Sodomites gathers his own together for a final demise as the city is bought to nothing.

Sodom is held up as a type of the last judgement, *Luk 17:29 But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Luk 17:30 Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.* God shows great patience with today's "men of Sodom" but the judgement will come and Abram's intercession is only for the "righteous", *Gen 18:32 And he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake.*

Look at what we do, we pray for sinners who do not pray for themselves. We pray for sinners but we do not have the strength of character to confront the sinner about his ways. We are nothing but moral cowards. We should be more constructive in our prayers and think just what we are praying for, not just pray out of an emotional heart. We also pray because we lack faith not because we have faith. We think that praying will cover the lack of doing, *Jas 2:17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Jas 2:18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith*

without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Jas 2:19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. Faith does not cover for not acting.

What did Abram pray for the people of Sodom? Nothing at all. He was aware of God's coming destruction of the wicked and remained silent. He saw the wicked of Sodom, the little boys and girls, the young men and women, with their lives before them, the cripples of that city, the halt, the lame and the blind, the poor people, all the people you might be concerned with to pray for, and he says nothing. He was firmly grounded in God's plan to destroy this rotten stinking place and he is silent in prayer except for the righteous who might be there.

I do believe that Abram was a compassionate man, a good and gentle man that he gave to the needy, that he was hospitable, that he was empathetic and I think he would have been those things to all conditions of men, to gain some for the kingdom. But he did not pray for fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners. He did not pray for people who set their faces against God. Where he found them he could confront them and if they repented they became righteous but he did not pray somebody else would do it.

Now does our Lord **pray** for people or **confront** them? He confronts their sin. *Mar 10:21 Then Jesus looked at him and loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing. Go, sell everything you have, and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven; then come back and follow me." Mar 10:22 But his countenance fell at that command, and he went away in deep distress, for he owned a great deal of property. Mar 10:23 Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have money to get into the kingdom of God!" Williams.* The man was covetous.

Jesus loved him, yet because he was set on his own path, He let him go. He had given His advice and that was it. He did not say, "I will pray for you", for He had given the best advice the world had to offer and it was turned down. What would praying do? Would it give another better answer? No. See who we are told to pray for, what we pray for and you will see it is for the benefit of Christians.

People would today find Jesus too confrontational, too up front. He did not do, "lovey dovey", God loves everyone, and "tip toe" around the unbeliever, not mention religious issues in case they affect the snowflakes among us. Do not tell people that hell is a reality and they will go there if they do not repent, never have a debate about anything that will cause offence and of course readily accept what somebody else says, even if it is bonkers.

No, thank God He never held back but spoke the truth. The beloved Beatitudes are particularly interesting on the subject of Hell, *Mat 5:27 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: Mat 5:28 But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. Mat 5:29 And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. Mat 5:30 And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.*

Jesus told it straight like it is, not with malice but forthrightness. This straight talking has disappeared from our behaviour. We are submitting to the tyranny of weak minded people who cry crocodile tears to stop a person telling the truth. I saw it some 30 years ago at a bar-b-cue, when I was telling a young man about Christ, and he began to well up with tears and was rescued by his mother. She was a professed Christian but she did not want her son to hear the truth and be upset. It also transpired that her weakness in faith to Christ bled into her marriage, which ended in divorce some years later. Once the truth is stifled there is downgrade and death.

They are blind to the truth, *Mat 15:12 Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying? Mat 15:13 But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Mat 15:14 Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.*

But Abram was above all, loyal to God and loyal to the truth. This loyalty was tested as we shall see with Isaac. His only begotten son was to become a test of his faith. Well, if you expect the Lord to let His only begotten son to die, the least you can do for Him is to sacrifice your son if called upon. If the Lord is going to judge the World in righteousness, by the man Jesus, who he has appointed, what are you doing praying for the World to be saved? It does not appear to be God's will to save the whole World.

Jesus did not pray for the World. *Joh 17:8 For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. Joh 17:9 I pray for them: **I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.***

However, Jesus prayed for His children and yes, they are sinners and they need every help they can get. What is the difference between the World's children and the children of the Kingdom? The difference is the grace of God. *Rom 5:15 But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and **the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many.***

Pray for the brethren that they will be faithful to the end. Pray for the health of the soul, more than the body. You are not yet there in Glory yet and a lot can go wrong. Keep praying for the saints. As Jesus prayed for Peter, *Luk 22:32 But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.*

14. Choose your friends carefully (part 2)

King Bera of Sodom was a person that Abraham did not honour but he did not stop his nephew from going back to Sodom, neither did he cease to intercede for him. Lot as we see moved from a tent to a house but could not stop the tide of evil, no matter how close he got to the people. Abram kept separate from the Sodomites knowing that you cannot change the "plague of the heart" except by an act of God.

The next king to greet him was Melchizedek who blesses Abram and confers on him a tithe. *Gen 14:18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. Gen 14:19 And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: Gen 14:20 And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all.*

There are a number of issues I would like to examine here.

1. The priesthood.
2. The tithe.
3. The wider meaning of the meeting of Abram and Melchizedek.

We turn to the New Testament for clarification of these issues. *Heb 7:1 Melchizedek was both king of Salem and priest of God Most High. (He was the one who went out and gave Abraham his blessing, when Abraham returned from killing the kings. Heb 7:2 Then Abraham gave him a tenth of everything he had.)* The meaning of the name Melchizedek is "King of Justice." But since Salem means "peace," he is also "King of Peace." *Heb 7:3 We are not told that he had a father or mother or ancestors or beginning or end. He is like the Son of God and will be a priest forever. Heb 7:4 Notice how great Melchizedek is! Our famous ancestor Abraham gave him **a tenth of what he had taken from his enemies.** Heb 7:5 The Law teaches that even Abraham's descendants must give a tenth of what they possess. And they are to give this to their own relatives, who are the descendants of Levi and are priests. Heb 7:6 Although Melchizedek wasn't a descendant of Levi, Abraham gave him a tenth of what he had. Then Melchizedek blessed Abraham, who had been given God's promise. Heb 7:7 Everyone agrees that a person who gives a blessing is greater than the one who receives the blessing. Heb 7:8 Priests are given a tenth of what people earn. But all priests die, except Melchizedek, and the Scriptures teach that he is alive. Heb 7:9 Levi's descendants are now the ones who receive a tenth from people. We could even say that when Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth, **Levi also gave him a tenth.** Heb 7:10 This is because Levi was born later into the family of Abraham, who gave a tenth to Melchizedek. CEV.*

Notice the parenthesis in blue where we go into a very brief background of Abram before picking up the story again and describing Melchizedek. Melchizedek was by his name the King of Righteousness and King of Peace and our hearts jump straight to the Lord Jesus. *Isa 9:6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Isa 9:7 Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.* It is no mere coincidence that Melchizedek is given the names of Christ, in fact he could have been called the Christ of the Patriarchs for he was the Lord's anointed Priest.

We sometimes forget these men were once children, although as far as scripture is concerned: *Heb 7:3 We are not told that he had a father or mother or ancestors or beginning or end. He is like the Son of God and will be a priest forever.* He was like the Son of God, similar to, ἀφομοιῶ = aphomoioō, assimilated closely or made like, but he was not in actuality Christ. But the reality is that

he had parents who doted on him and saw the future in Christ and called their son after His attributes.

Meeting Melchizedek for the first time, in Scripture, was Abram's introduction to the priesthood and all that it signified. He may have met him before and they may have been friends as Abram passed close to the city of the Jebusites, Salem, on his way through the land, but it is here and under these circumstances, that Abram is formally greeted, as the lesser brother to Melchizedek's senior brother, *Heb 7:7 Everyone agrees that a person who gives a blessing is greater than the one who receives the blessing.*

What was the priesthood for? We saw the Temple in the form of Noah's Ark (See in book "Christ the Creator" page 127 by MAW), and so from Noah who sacrificed to God, others were also given this task. A line of priests, from ancient China to ancient America, came from Noah, of which Melchizedek was one.

The priests were there to offer sacrifices, *Heb 8:1 Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; Heb 8:2 A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. Heb 8:3 For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man (Christ) have somewhat also to offer.*

His priesthood was more like Christ's priesthood than Levi's, *Heb 7:14 For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. Heb 7:15 And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest, Heb 7:16 Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. Heb 7:17 For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.* There were quite clearly priests and priests and that not all priests were of Levi. One priesthood was constituted by law, the other under the power of an endless life or as Young's Literal Version has it, according to the "power of an indissoluble life". Melchizedek had a priesthood like Christ's not Levi's.

Abram by this was introduced to the priesthood of Christ, here in the book of Genesis, before the Levites had ever been ordained, conceived or thought of. Abram is introduced to the bread and the wine sacred to Christ and in taking it, he did so in anticipation of Him. It was not a blood sacrifice that greeted Abram but the elements of Christ. The descent into blood sacrifices was a retrograde step, but it showed that the higher gift was Christ, supreme, above all and first over all. Abram was by this introduced to the priesthood and submits himself to it and by submitting, falls before Christ.

What was the tithe for? The "Institute in basic life principles", a Christian resource, states, "Typically, the tithe should be given to the local church where you worship. These gifts support your pastor and ministry staff members who are actively serving you and they help maintain the work of the church in your community. As God prospers you and directs (sic!) you, additional gifts can be given to other ministries that are advancing the Gospel." Well heave ho, they have wrestled it straight out of its context and given it to pastors and ministry staff members. I should dearly love to see a scripture for that or where the New Testament appeals to the tithe to finance the ministry. **It does not**, but seeing financing the New Testament ministry is a diversion, I return to look at the real meaning of a tithe.

Why was the tithe given to a priest and not to anyone? *Exo 30:30 And thou shalt anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office.* It was not given to financial controllers, accountants, business managers, charity chiefs it was given to priests, it was given to ministers, the priests, the representatives of God. What Melchizedek did with the tithe I know not, but he was the Lord's representative and worthy to receive it.

The support of the priesthood and the poor were the primary beneficiaries. *Deu 14:27 And the Levite that is within thy gates; thou shalt not forsake him; for he hath no part nor inheritance with thee. Deu 14:28 At the end of three years thou shalt bring forth all the tithe of thine increase the same year, and shalt lay it up within thy gates: Deu 14:29 And the Levite, (because he hath no part nor inheritance with thee,) and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest.*

God took care of the priesthood and the poor through the tithe and the tithe went where God said it should go. It did not go where God did not say it should go. The tithe was God's to distribute and where giving was not on account of this, it was not called the tithe.

Abram's tithe was not his own wealth, not gained by his labour, unless you call war, labour, *Heb 7:4 Abraham gave him a tenth of what he had taken from his enemies.* It was given from the spoils of war. It did not matter where it came from, it was sanctified by the Lord, it was a mark of God's blessing, it was a mark of the Lord's Victory over the enemy, and it was given when Abraham returned victorious.

God owns everything and so I suppose, there is no reason to give Him anything, as Paul says: *Act 17:24 God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Act 17:25 Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;* But it is a token of He who owns everything, *Lev 25:3 Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof; Lev 25:4 But in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the LORD: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard. Lev 25:5 That which groweth of its own accord of thy harvest thou shalt not reap, neither gather the grapes of thy vine undressed: for it is a year of rest unto the land. Lev 25:6 And the sabbath of the land shall be meat for you; for thee, and for thy servant, and for thy maid, and for thy hired servant, and for thy stranger that sojourneth with thee, Lev 25:7 And for thy cattle, and for the beast that are in thy land, shall all the increase thereof be meat.*

The Jubilees, the year of release, the Restoration year, the year of reversion, were also to show that no man owned anything, it was all by the grace of God. But man was required to acknowledge the fact and the tithe was a way of showing that the earth was the Lord's.

And what of the wider meaning of Abram and Melchizedek? It was to show the Old Testament in its relationship to Christ. As Melchizedek had lifted up his hand to the Lord, possessor of heaven and earth, so too does Abram, unlike the king of Sodom. *Gen 14:21 And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself. Gen 14:22 And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and*

earth, Gen 14:23 That I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich: Gen 14:24 Save only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion.

Notice how early on in scripture, God establishes CHRIST. Long before the Levites existed Christ was established, *Joh 8:58 Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.* This enigmatic Psalm of David has a lot to say about this, *Psa 110:1 A **Psalm of David.** The affirmation of Jehovah to my Lord: 'Sit at My right hand, Till I make thine enemies thy footstool.'* *Psa 110:2 The rod of thy strength doth Jehovah send from Zion, Rule in the midst of thine enemies. Psa 110:3 Thy people are free-will gifts in the day of Thy strength, in the honours of holiness, From the womb, from the morning, Thou hast the dew of thy youth. Psa 110:4 Jehovah hath sworn, and doth not repent, 'Thou art a priest to the age, According to the order of Melchizedek.'* *Psa 110:5 The Lord on thy right hand smote kings In the day of His anger. Psa 110:6 He doth judge among the nations, He hath completed the carcasses, Hath smitten the head over the mighty earth. Psa 110:7 From a brook in the way he drinketh, Therefore he doth lift up the head! YLT.*

This Psalm was written by King David but it was not about David. It was about another person, a person who would be a priest forever. No, not a priest like Aaron, or like Phineas, or like Zadok but like Melchizedec, a priest according to the order of Melchizedec. What a gigantic slap in the face for the Levitical priests. There is no mention of them in this Messianic blessing but there is of Him who will have His enemies under His feet, rule with a rod of iron, will smite the kings of the earth and the mighty Man who is a priest like Melchizedek

This Psalm is quoted by Peter at the feast of Pentecost, in Acts chapter 2, when the tongues of Great Babylon gave way to the unity of the Spirit, when confusion gave way to certainty. He shows us that David, being a prophet, was not speaking of himself in the Psalms but another, *Act 2:25 For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Act 2:26 Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope:*

David's hope was in the very person spoken of in Psalm 110. Peter goes on to say: *Act 2:34 For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, **The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Act 2:35 Until I make thy foes thy footstool.** Act 2:36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, **that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.** Act 2:37 Now **when they heard this**, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?*

In quoting the Psalm, 110, Peter and David shows this person to be Christ, *Act 2:36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, **that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.*** David was talking of Christ, who ever appeared before his face, and was warning Israel of this fact.

Now it is not merely of an incidental fact that this is noted but for the effect that it had upon the hearers, *Act 2:37 Now **when they heard this**, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter*

and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Yes indeed what shall we do? This verse had struck home at the heart. The Old Testament was speaking to them loud and clear.

Act 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Act 2:39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. Act 2:40 And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Act 2:41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

There was nothing about the prayer of commitment, giving yourself to Jesus or coming forward to the altar to receive Him. It was a straightforward “repentance and baptism”. And we got all of that from the life of Abram, before the law ever scratched men’s hearts.

Abraham rejoiced to see Christ’s day, *Joh 8:56 Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.* I bet he did. He looked past the Law, past Moses, past the decline of Israel. His heart was not stayed on these earthly types but on Heaven itself, upon Christ. To those latter day “Jewishtians”, those who claim to know Christ but deny His word, who look for things that Abraham never looked for, who anticipate an earthly Israel and an earthly temple, the restoration of earthly Israel wallowing in blood sacrifice, you are carnal. Abraham looked for none of this and looked beyond the earth to Glory.

Do you see yourself going there or there already? I am there with the faithful, *Heb 12:22 But ye **are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, Heb 12:23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, Heb 12:24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.***

15. Religion before religion

This is a strange title but one which is apposite for this study. Abram’s religion is without the religious institutions that have come to dominate our religious landscape. It is the same religion, “Christianity” but stripped of all that complicates, nay obfuscates it, makes it obscure, makes it unclear or unintelligible. What is at its heart is revealed and it is the most ancient of religions.

Yet in spite of this lack of “institutional religion”, despite the lack of manmade structures, Abram entered the Kingdom, *Mat 8:11 And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. Mat 8:12 But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* He got there without the trappings of the ages and we would do well to note this, because our religious inventions may be obscuring the way to life.

Most modern religions could not exist without their “inventions” or we may say charitably, “distinctions”. The Church of England would not exist without its sacerdotalism, its ordained priests,

its archbishops, its liturgies, its buildings that define it and make it what it is. In my opinion it has held back the progress of the Gospel. It has stood in the way of reform from the day of its creation.

The poor Catholics have a similar institutional structure, before which its huddled masses stoop and genuflect, bow and scrape and count it an honour to be blessed by a Pope, a man. The Protestant churches tend to be derived from this mass of un-Biblical practices by secession from the catholic church, forming equally non-Biblical churches, institutions, although less grand. Where, O where did this mass of confusion come from? They are little different from the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mormons, the Christadelphians, all setting out their stalls, all shouting their wares, all complicating the simplicity in Christ.

Could Babylon be part of the process by which they came about? Not only were they confused with tongues, they were confused with religion, as can be seen around the ancient and modern world. The seeds of falsehood grew in the people with the increase in sin and it started in Eden, *Gen 2:17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.*

Religious rot set had set in and people did what they felt was right as far worship was concerned. As Judaism fell, Paul announced that God is not worshipped with men's hands. As was said at an earlier day in Israel's history: *Jdg 21:25 In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.*

Religion was conducted in glorious ignorance. In fact it always was, *Act 17:23 For as I passed by, and beheld **your devotions**, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. Act 17:24 God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Act 17:25 **Neither is worshipped with men's hands**, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;*

I remember that when I came to Christ, I was confronted with a large array of "churches" to attend. Were they all the same? No they were not. I was recommended to go to the Church of England, by well meaning Christians and soon found out that the vicar was not even converted. It was the same experience for many of those converted under Billy Graham's "altar" call.

I am going to ask you to come forward. Up there – down there – I want you to come. You come right now – quickly. If you are with friends or relatives, they will wait for you. Don't let distance keep you from Christ. Its a long way, but Christ went all the way to the Cross because He loved you. Certainly you can come these few steps and give your life to Him.....To those who were hesitating, the evangelist went on to add: God is speaking to you. Get up and come right now . . . a little voice says, "You ought to come to Christ." Come now quickly! You may never have another moment. You have to come by faith. You need Christ, you get up and come.

This "decision" making did not lead to any clarification. The people who thought they were doing what was right, what God had said, were sent back to the very denominations which had not served them and not shown them the Gospel. No wonder not many survived. Evangelists boast of getting

thousands of decisions for Christ, but when the crusade is over and real life happens again, have thousands of decisions been made for Christ? Did that many people really come to Jesus in faith and repentance?

In 1991 a major Christian denomination in the United States, reported that they had obtained 294,784 decisions for Jesus Christ that year. In March of 1993, the denomination's magazine, American Horizon reported that after two years of intense follow-up, the denomination could only account for 1,400 of those decisions. 1,400 out of 294,784. They could not find the others in a church, in their own denomination or in a church in any denomination. Only 0.5 per cent of their new converts were living like new converts two years of their conversion. In 1995, another leading denomination in the U.S. reported that they had secured 384,057 decisions but retained only 22,983 in their respective churches. They could not account for 361,074 conversions. Only 6 per cent remained.

I had fortunately avoided the Altar call and "Decision", when I came to the Lord, but I had no idea what a church should be like. In fact it has taken me 50 years to get to this point and I am not so much the wiser. I grew more and more distrustful of men who talked a good game, but did not "do" the Scripture. This really grated with me. When I was saved, I started going to an Anglican church. One Sunday after I had been baptised by immersion in a Baptist chapel, I came back and told the Anglican "Canon" what I had done, expecting him to be pleased with me, instead I got the church door slammed in my face. To be fair, the man did come round to the house and apologise. Then there was a Baptist minister who said that I was 99 per cent right in what I was saying about Bible practices, but he was not going to do anything about it.

There were many such instances that led me to distrust formal churches. I even encountered many ministers who were not even saved, and there they were in a position of authority. I did however meet many lovely Christian brothers and sisters, but could not understand why so many, who professed the faith, did not personally know Jesus as Saviour.

This last week (1st February 2021) a character emerged in the Church of England, the Reverend Jarel Robinson-Brown, who it transpires is coloured racist, making comments about centenarian Tom Moore, who died of Covid. Robinson-Brown is also a homosexual and says he is "passionate about the issues of justice, particularly in the areas of race and sexuality". He has been appointed to a historic church in the City of London which (unlike some) welcomes gay worshippers. To the many thousands who worship in the Church of England and who go along with this by silently acknowledging or turning a blind eye instead of protesting this behaviour, are typical of the rotten state of this "woke" Institution, and it is characteristic of the way that their religion serves God. I do not serve God that way and I encourage the Christians among them to leave. Jesus said: *Mat 12:30 He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.*

Now I am not saying that I am a perfect Christian, far be it that any one should think that of me. I am a deeply flawed person, with sin, and the old Adam is continually trying to raise himself from the grave into my life. Many times I have cried before God that I have let the Name of the Lord be brought into disrepute. Many times I have acted out of vainglory and put self and self reputation

first. I am not worthy to untie His shoe laces, but there is no excuse or self pity that can deter me from what my task is, teaching.

I remember what O T Allis said when as an old man, he was asked if he had defeated sin in his life. "Young man" he replied, "that is incipient perfectionism, the sins that I wrestle with now are the sins of my youth". You see, we all of us carry around the seeds of sin. It is not surprising that we see the seeds bursting in all areas of life, and the devil will water them most where they will grow to do most damage.

If we do not see this fact of life, sin and death, we shall have a false view of life and further the destruction. We need to halt for a moment and take stock of what we are doing, and this should be a regular feature of our Christian life. I remember in the early 1970's, during the OPEC oil crisis, when due to the petrol shortage we could not go to our various churches, that I gathered together with some brethren from different denominations. We decided we would find out what a church should really do, and like someone renovating a building we stripped our traditions off the wall, to see what lay beneath. Gradually over the next 3 years we went back to basic Christianity.

We found that Christians just worshipped in their homes, that the ministers actually were gifted men, not college boys, that there was no religious hierarchy that were required to take the Lord's table, and anybody who was worthy could take the table. We found that believers were baptised by one Spirit and that water baptism was by immersion in water. We found that Christians alone made up the church, which was not actually a building but people. We found that unrighteousness does not inherit the kingdom of God, and that you must be born again. This we discovered and much else besides. It was a puzzle why people maintained institutions and structures which were non-Scriptural.

I suppose that we could have gone back further than the first century but we did not at the time. But I am suggesting that we can go back further, to find the roots of our religion, *Rom 11:16 If the first handful of dough is holy, the whole batch of dough is holy. If the root is holy, the branches are holy. Rom 11:17 But some of the olive branches have been broken off, and you, a wild olive branch, have been grafted in their place. **You get your nourishment from the roots of the olive tree.** Rom 11:18 So don't brag about being better than the other branches. If you brag, remember that you don't support the root, **the root supports you.** Rom 11:19 "Well," you say, "Branches were cut off so that I could be grafted onto the tree." Rom 11:20 That's right! They were broken off because they didn't believe, but you remain on the tree because you do believe. Don't feel arrogant, but be afraid. Rom 11:21 If God didn't spare the natural branches, he won't spare you, either. GW'*

Our roots were growing long before Christianity came along, long before Judaism came along, back to the beginning of the Creation. They were growing in God's garden, where Jesus is the gardener. Sin entered into the world and the world brought forth thorns and thistles and so too did the churches. We should not believe for a moment that the Churches are sinless when we live in a sinful world.

Building the church is a bit like going to a DIY store and getting what you think is a "church". It is a flat pack church, a bit like those "tin tabernacles" that Christians used to erect 100 years ago, but this is spiritual. When you have your "concept" of the church together, you find some bits are

annoyingly left over and the structure looks wonky. So, instead of taking it to pieces again and following the pattern more carefully, instead you stick some more bits on to shore it up. You even go so far as to make some parts that you think will do the job of stabilising the structure.

Shoring up is what we do best, never mind what God said. Uzzah did this to the Ark of the Covenant because it was a bit wobbly in its progress along the road, *2Sa 6:6 And when they came to Nachon's threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. 2Sa 6:7 And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God.*

If we want to see through the incense, stop being dazzled by the golden crucifixes, push the men aside who are dressed up in all sorts of clownish garb, get the massive edifices out of the way, claiming to be built for “the Glory of God” and hopefully, see Jesus. We have a lot of work to do. It means we have a lot of tradition to get rid of. Mark Twain said, **“The less there is to justify a traditional custom, the harder it is to get rid of it”**. There is a lot of truth in that saying.

That leads me back to Abram. He was relatively de-cluttered as far as religion was concerned. I wonder what he would have thought of the post modern churches. He would not have a clue about their forms of worship. But he was saved and he got to glory all without our modern “religion”. In fact he is an example to us of simple Christianity, stripped of its complications, of its rubric and being side lined by other things. fabric, unadorned, as Adam was created. It was easier to concentrate on the essentials instead of

Now here is a thing that you can meditate on. When you are approached by people from institutional churches, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mormons, the Anglicans the Baptists, or whatever modern name they have hoisted up their flagpoles, and they try to justify their religion, all you have to do is direct them to faithful Abram, *Gal 3:8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, **preached before the gospel unto Abraham**, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. Gal 3:9 So then **they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham**.*

We are not blessed by these manmade institutions but we are blessed by the Gospel of Abraham which taught about God's Kingdom that Abraham found, entered and lived in. The Good News was heard long before these modern institutions put their spin upon it and distorted it, hoping to improve it.

Tell people you go to Abram's church, the church of the firstborn, in the City of God, *Heb 12:22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the **city of the living God**, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, Heb 12:23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, Heb 12:24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.*

Abram was foreknown, predestinated, called, justified, and glorified. *Rom 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. Rom 8:29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Rom 8:30 Moreover whom he*

did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

Abram had all the credentials for salvation and he is saved in exactly the same way as us, or should I say, **we are saved in exactly the same way as he was, Gal 3:9 So then *they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham*. If, says the Apostle, IF you are Christ's, that is you and me, if we are Christ's, then we are Abrahams seed, Gal 3:28 *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. Gal 3:29 And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.***

Where does our belief start? It does not start in our church buildings, it does not start in the streets outside the churches, in the wider society, it starts in our minds, *Jas 1:14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Jas 1:15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*

Sin is unseen by men, being conceived in the dark recesses of our minds and this was true of Abram as for us. Christ alone came to deliver men of the Old Testament and New Testament by destroying, loosing us from the works of the devil, *1Jn 3:8 He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.*

The fabric of institutional religion is in a sense, incidental to the fight against sin. It does nothing to destroy sin, it may even hinder the fight against it, for it is in man that sin exists. They say religion is the cause of wars, it is not, it is us. *Jas 4:1 From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Jas 4:2 Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Jas 4:3 Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.*

Sin conceived in us breaks out in all manner of crimes against humanity. When we brew our sin it is without the aid of the Institutional churches. They exist to sell their wares, to make people conform to their idea of what a Christian should be, to the exclusion of the other institutions. They say "this is what a Christian is like" and you are a lost soul without our help. You pass from the position of unbeliever into the hands of a denomination as their unbeliever, which will make you in its image not Christ's.

While trying to restore a 19th-century painting, an elderly woman in Spain says she unintentionally defaced it. Catholic parishioners in the Spanish town of Borja had hoped for a restored century-old painting of Jesus Christ. Instead, the painting was returned to their church defaced.

The culprit was an elderly woman who tried to touch up the weathered "ecce homo" fresco herself. She claims to have had the best intentions and even had permission from the parish priest. The painting is by Elias Garcia Martinez, a 19th-century painter. It has hung in the Sanctuary of Mercy Church in Borja, near the city of Zaragoza, for more than 100 years.

Ecce homo translates to "behold the man." It's an artistic motif that shows Jesus, usually bound and with a crown of thorns, right before his crucifixion, according to the New York Times. Art historians are expected to meet at the church soon to discuss how to repair the painting. But Joyce Hill Stoner, a



Figure 18 Defacing an image

paintings conservator at the University of Delaware, says the damage may be irreversible. The news shocked her and her students.

Each time we attempt to improve on the image of Christ, we make a mess of it. Abram was fortunate not to have the confusion of today, to have to pick his way among the various church denominations. **But then, neither do we, if we stand with faithful Abram.**

16. I am thy shield

Gen 15:1 After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.

I had a thought, that none of this experience that Abram went through, occurred in what we would call a religious setting, a sacred grove, a temple, it occurred in the everyday circumstances of life. That is where most experiences of God take place. When we come together in one place, it is to take the Lords table or share what we have of been shown of God, *1Co 14:26 How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.*

The privilege of coming together is to share what God has done or what God has given us, outside of the gathering, where our Christianity happens. It is not coming together to suck the others dry, and get your experiences vicariously, to live off of other Christians experiences. If you have nothing to bring, what is the Lord doing in your life? As Abram is going through life he is building up his experience of God and they are shared with us.

How Abram's experience got transmitted and recorded, whether through God's direct revelation to Moses or whether he recorded it for Moses to edit, remains a mystery. However it was recorded, the revelation to Abram has been progressive. Four times it is recorded, up to now in our narrative, that God spoke to him as the Lord **Jehovah** and the Lord is none other than the **Lord Jesus**. Let me remind us that **the Creator was Jesus**, *Joh 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Joh 1:2 The same was in the beginning with God. Joh 1:3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. Joh 1:4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men.*

The four times Jesus speaks (yes, this is not a typo) are: *Gen 12:1 Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: Gen 12:7 And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him. Gen 13:14 And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: Gen 13:15 For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. Gen 13:16 And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Gen 13:17 Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee..... Gen 15:1 After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.*

He was told to leave his country, that he would be given “this” land, that it would be given to his seed who would be as many as the dust of the earth, and lastly, that He would shield and reward Abram.

The Word of the Lord came in a vision, sound and sight, not a quiet vision but one that filled the senses. We did not see that God spoke like this before, in fact His method of communicating with man was not described to us, *Gen 12:1 Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:.....Gen 12:7 And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.....Gen 13:14 And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: Gen 13:15 For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.* Here it is laid out, “the LORD came unto Abram in a vision”.

How he spoke to man was not yet described in Scripture, but now He speaks in visions and I must also ask whether it is typical? I get sick and tired of those people who keep saying, “the Lord spoke to me”, when it is obvious that they spoke to themselves. See what the outcomes of these words are and you will see that they mostly come to nothing or are conveniently forgotten. At worst they will claim something which is obviously false. Like the dear brother I worked with, who one day declared his eyes healed and that he did not need reading glasses anymore. He threw them away in an act of faith but eventually got some again, quietly, of course.

People use tongues the same way, not bothering to have an interpreter. I remember Pastor North pulling someone up sharply for speaking in tongues and not having an interpretation. He said “interpret” and there was a deafening silence. I am not saying that God does not speak to men, but in the Bible, which is our guide, the frequency is very low and it seems He reserves it for important communication, not trivial. For general revelation He has reserved the Scripture, *Rom 15:4 For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope..... 2Ti 3:16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 2Ti 3:17 That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

It does not say all visions, dreams are for this purpose, yet they do have a specific purpose. Dreams and visions are it seems the principal ways God speaks to man, *Dan 1:17 As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams..... Act 2:17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:* These are just two methods of revelation, by direct communication between man and God. Prophecy is one way and so is the Theophany, the manifestation of Christ, in person.

An example of Prophecy is: *Pro 31:1 The words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him.* This comment by Dr Gill is helpful:

“the prophecy that his mother taught him; either in his youth, or when he was come to the throne; to whom she had access, and with whom she used freedom; and particularly when she saw he was inclined unto, or going into, the vices she cautions him against. Her instruction is called a "prophecy", because she delivered it on a foresight of the sins her son would be tempted with, and liable to fall into; and this foresight was either through her natural sagacity, or under a spirit of prophecy; or rather it is so called, because any wise saying, or doctrine of moment and importance, and especially if it was by divine inspiration, was so called; as Solomon tells us what his father David taught him, so here what his mother Bathsheba instructed him and he gave to his son;

The vision is I suppose the breaking and entering the personal space of the individual, an opening of the visual field to see what, under normal conditions, is hidden. It is conscious, which is not in a sleeping state. It is like Paul's vision, *Act 9:3 And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: Act 9:4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? Act 9:5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. Act 9:6 And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. Act 9:7 And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. Act 9:8 And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.*

The second account of this event in Paul's life, is given in Acts chapter 22 at the Temple, *Act 22:6 And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. Act 22:7 And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? Act 22:8 And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. Act 22:9 And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me. Act 22:10 And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. Act 22:11 And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus.*

There are three accounts of the vision, and in the third Paul says to Agrippa. *Act 26:19 Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision:* This establishes it was a vision. But it was a vision to Paul alone. They saw a light, but saw no man. They heard a voice but did not understand it. J N Darby explains it for us:

The word for voice is φωνή = phōnē, and **the accusative case** is used in Acts 9:7, and Acts 22:7 whereas **the genitive case** is used in Acts 22:9 and 14. **The genitive** is 'to listen to' or when the voice of a rumour reaches. It is the fact of physical hearing. **The accusative** is that part of the thing heard, is before the mind.

In other words, they heard the sound but did not register the meaning of what was said. It was given completely to Paul but the substance of it was withheld from those standing around Paul. A vision can be isolated from those standing around.

I am not sure why God chooses these different methods of communication, but I suppose because He can. We often communicate in different ways, writing, e-mail, 'phone, skype, face to face, pictures etc, as they suit us. In our passage it is by vision, and this is one of many that are to come. It may also be termed prophecy, *Heb 1:1 In the past God spoke to our ancestors at many different times and in many different ways through the prophets.* GW.

It was not just a prophecy to Abram, it was to all faithful generations, and Abram was a prophet, *Gen 20:6 And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her. Gen 20:7 Now therefore restore the man his wife; for he is a **prophet**, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live: and if thou restore her not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that are thine.*

Can I expect a similar experience? Yes you can, if you believe that we are in the last days, *Act 2:16 But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; Act 2:17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall **prophesy**, and your young men shall see **visions**, and your old men shall dream **dreams**: Act 2:18 And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy:*

I must say though, that you and I are not in control of these manifestations. They are not controlled by you but by the Lord, even if they are subject to you, *1Co 14:32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. 1Co 14:33 For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.* Because you are subject to deceit. *1Jn 4:1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*

God speaks these words to Abram in the Vision. ***"I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward"***, *Deu 33:29 Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, **the shield of thy help**, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places.*

This is part of the armour of God, the whole armour, “pan Hoplos”, panoply of God. How sharp your sword is and how protective your shield is will depend on how much effort you put into your faith, but if it is not based upon God’s pattern it will be useless. *Eph 6:16 Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.*

God promises dear Abram that He will protect Him. Fresh from the victory over the “Babylonians” one might think that he needed no protection, but the battles to come are not of this world’s making, *Eph 6:12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.* He will see these battles played out around him and that will make him long for the City of God.

God says another thing to comfort him and I will give you three translations of the verse, *Gen 15:1 After these things hath the word of Jehovah been unto Abram in a vision, saying, 'Fear not, Abram, I am a shield to thee, **thy reward is exceeding great.**'* YLT.....*Gen 15:1 After these things the Word of Jehovah came to Abram in a vision, saying, Do not fear, Abram; I am your shield, **your reward will increase greatly.*** LITV.....*Gen 15:1 After these things, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, Have no fear, Abram: I will keep you safe, and **great will be your reward.*** BBE.

What is the reward? Is it a reward that does not include God or is it a reward that is God Himself? I say it is God Himself. The Hebrew might give both answers as correct yet we go to the wider Scripture. As king David says: *Psa 73:23 Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Psa 73:24 Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Psa 73:25 Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. Psa 73:26 My flesh and my heart faileth: but **God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.***

David sees beyond “now” to the hereafter and that God alone, Elohim, is his portion. God does not shield us so that we can enjoy riches which perish. He shields us so that we might partake of Him fully. He is also the great reward, *Php 3:20 But we are citizens of heaven and are eagerly waiting for our Savior to come from there. Our Lord Jesus Christ Php 3:21 has power over everything, and he will make these poor bodies of ours like his own glorious body.* CEV.

I note that Abram is not filled with self pity at his lot in life because he has Christ as his reward. Some people bemoan their lot, hoping for sympathy or revenge on people for their selfish existence. But he does not go about bemoaning his circumstances, blaming others, poor me look at the hand life has dealt me! He does not gather the disenchanted to his banners, like so many of the world, bemoaning their lot life, not seeing it for the good it offers and not, above all, seeing Christ who loves us with an everlasting love.

This is another distinctive of the believer, they do not “grumble”, *Jas 5:9 Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.* Moaning is one of the devil’s diseases. He always sows the seed of discontent, brings God’s word into contempt, and it grows and grows until it replaces all thoughts about God.

Look at Job, he does not complain although he suffers. He has nearly lost everything but he does not give Satan the pleasure of a “moan”. *Job 2:9 Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die. Job 2:10 But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? **shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?** In all this did not Job sin with his lips.*

He sees the good he gets and the evil, as from the hand of the Almighty. He does not mention that source of evil, the devil. I think that Job knew Christ, *Job 19:25 For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: Job 19:26 And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God:*

He, like Abram possessed the shield of Christ. You too can possess it. The Shield of faith can shelter you and me from the arrows of satan and the arrows of men.

Do you bemoan your circumstance then watch this.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fdxwor9vwoQ> Born without arms or legs, Pittsburgh woman believes "God doesn't make mistakes."

17. The reward

In the Scriptures we find Jesus, from the beginning to the end, *Joh 5:39 Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and **they are they which testify of me.** Joh 5:40 And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life..... Joh 5:45 Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. Joh 5:46 For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for **he wrote of me.***

This is saying quite clearly that the writings of the Old Testament testify of Jesus. The word is μαρτυρέω = martureō which means to be a witness, martyr, that is, one who bears a record of the events. Jesus bears a record of the events, is a record of events throughout the Old Testament. (For proof of his go to <https://jesusplusnothing.com/jesus-books-bible>).

The Bible is a book about Jesus, how He fits into the Cosmos or should I say, how the Cosmos fits into Jesus. It is His Redemptive plan from His creation of the world and how He prepared His people for a Heavenly Kingdom. On every page is written “**the testimony of Jesus**”.

Jesus the key to prophecy, *Rev 1:1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: Rev 1:2 Who bare record of the word of God, and of **the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.** Rev 19:10 And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the **testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.** Man is not the key but Jesus is.*

Now I say this, if you find any passage of Scripture difficult to interpret, then look for Jesus. We see Him in relationships, in objects, in people, perhaps a faint glimmer of what He is, but He is there. When looking at relationships between anything, we should ask, “How does it relate to Jesus and His

Word?” From abortion to capital punishment, from marriage to divorce, from physics to philosophy, it all becomes clearer when we see Jesus in relation to the things about us.

We are so absorbed with self that we use scripture to see **our** future, and what concerns us most is the future, the future of Israel, how the world will end, what plagues come upon us, what wars we suffer, where the plagues come from. We are totally and utterly selfish, for we consider our future and take our eyes off of the King of Kings. We use our Christianity for gain, as the mother of those disciples, *Mat 20:21 And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. Mat 20:22 But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?*

Jesus issued a rebuke to the disciples about this future casting, *Act 1:6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? Act 1:7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.* He did not answer them. Perhaps He would, perhaps He would not restore it, that should not be a concern to us, what should concern us is this: *Act 1:8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.* It is being a witness, a martyr for Christ that matters.

Solomon had the right attitude in his early days. He saw that what established his kingdom was wisdom, *1Co 1:30 But of him are ye in **Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:** 1Co 1:31 That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.* Solomon sought Christ. *2Ch 1:10 Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people: for who can judge this thy people, that is so great? 2Ch 1:11 And God said to Solomon, Because this was in thine heart, and thou hast not asked riches, wealth, or honour, nor the life of thine enemies, neither yet hast asked long life; but hast asked wisdom and knowledge for thyself, that thou mayest judge my people, over whom I have made thee king: 2Ch 1:12 Wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee; and I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honour, such as none of the kings have had that have been before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like.*

When we turn to the section before us, we will gather that it is not about Abram. This section is about Christ, *Gen 15:1 After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.* I puzzled over this verse until I saw Christ.

The whole passage seems to be inverted, the answer comes before the question. *Gen 15:1 After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. Gen 15:2 And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? Gen 15:3 And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.*

The Lord appears to Abram and states that He would be His reward, then Abram says, “*what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless*”. Surely the passage should start: *Gen 15:2 And Abram said, Lord*

GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? Gen 15:3 And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. To which God answers, Gen 15:1 Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. Yet it is exactly the opposite way around to the way we would write it. Why?

This could be a number of things....It could be a heading for the section? The section declares God's intent and provides a summary of what will follow, "*I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward*". It could be more important than the other verses and so is raised to be the chapter heading. It could be a transposition as I have described. I could be an introductory statement. We shall see as we study further.

What is important though is what is said in verse one: *Gen 15:1 After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.* Firstly the "**Word of the Lord came to him**". I do not think that it is simply a word, like a voice recording, or a booming sound from nowhere that men heard on the Damascus road. This is the Christ, the person who comes bringing the thoughts of God to Abram.

We usually talk about the Word of God as the Scripture. But in its highest form it is a Person, Jesus Christ. Is God happy that we just comply with His written word or that we have a relationship with His Word? *Joh 5:38 And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not. Joh 5:39 Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. Joh 5:40 And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.* No, God's word should lead to a relationship with Christ not the written word. The Jews made this mistake.

The Word is Christ and He brings God's thoughts into life, *Joh 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Joh 1:2 The same was in the beginning with God. Joh 1:3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. Joh 1:4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men. Joh 1:5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.*

Christ came to Abram with the astounding news that He was going to become the forerunner of "the seed", singular, which is Christ, *Gal 3:16 Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.* The pre-eminence of Christ, is I think, the reason that this verse comes before everything else. It lays the table firmly upon the cloth of Christ.

The pre-eminent Word of God, the King of Kings, the First and the Last is here introduced to Abram, *Rev 19:13 And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God, Rev 19:14 And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. Rev 19:15 And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.*

This is the first time Abram speaks in the monologues of God and it is perhaps a way of introducing Himself as the Messiah. Not only the Word, but there is more, "*I am thy shield, and thy exceeding*

great reward." It is unconditional for it does not say *"I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward"*, if you obey all my words. So this is another reason for this verse coming at the head of this section, for it states the fact, before all else, that God is with Abram, through thick and thin and will deliver him, unconditionally.

Do you hear what Christ is saying? **"I am a shield to you and your great reward"**. Soon Abram will be finished with this world and he will become the ashes of history:

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away
Change and decay in all around I see
Thou who changest not, abide with me

Abram entered this world and became a faithful witness, a faithful martyr for God, went to live his life as God ordained, battled satan's devils, and left the stage of life having played his part in God's plan. It was now for others to enter the fight and take his place. But it did not end there for Abram, he was a faithful servant, *Mat 25:23 His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.* The joy of the Lord was his reward, the eternal smile of approval, *"I am your exceeding great reward"*.

The reward was not having a large family, with all the disagreements that would bring. The reward was not the nation of Israel, a disappointment and an eventual apostate to the covenant. The reward was not the Law which came from his future generations, but which could not save a single soul. All of this life's works were tainted by sin and that is no reward. But Christ, pure, agreeable, faithful, the Saviour was a reward worth having. He was worth the anticipation, coming in the flesh, and that Abram rejoiced at, but more, he rejoiced in His reward.

The reward though was not on the earth it was in the kingdom of heaven. What are we expecting this heaven to be like? To many it is the escape from this life, when tiredness and old age take over, the decaying body finally looks for regeneration, looks for escape and sees it in heaven when all earthly hope has passed.

I know people who want heaven, but not yet. They would leave for heaven on the last train, at the very last minute because there are things that occupy them which are more important. I had a friend dying of cancer, who said that he was ready to go but wanted to see his grandchild. If you thought about it, you could make a wish list up to see your great grandchildren, and their children until you came to the end of time.

Death is never convenient and it waits for no man, but that does not mean we are to hang on to life, *Luk 2:29 Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: Luk 2:30 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Luk 2:31 Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;* This man Simeon, knew Christ and recognised Him even as a baby, and having seen the promise fulfilled was ready to go. He found his comfort in Christ.

What is heaven, but the place where Christ is? The future is cloudy, *1Co 13:12 Now we see a blurred image in a mirror. Then we will see very clearly. Now my knowledge is incomplete. Then I will have complete knowledge as God has complete knowledge of me.* GW. It is to speculate what it shall be like, but we have Christ now, and we shall have Him then.

Abram was not given precise notions about the future, they are all speculations of the human heart anyway. What he was given, was what you and I should be concentrating on, the same as Paul, *Php 3:10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; Php 3:11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.*

He does not presume that he will get to heaven, for he says, *"If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead"*. But he does seek to know Him, he does seek to know the power of His resurrection, he does seek to know the fellowship of His sufferings, to be made like Him in death.

Do not be distracted from this task of knowing Him intimately, for therein is the Great Reward.

18. The question?

*Gen 15:2 And Abram said, Lord GOD, **what wilt thou give me**, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? Gen 15:3 And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.*

It was one of the questions that I was asked many times when I was in Africa. A smiling face would appear and say, "What have you brought me?" It was not malicious and I suppose it was asked because the Europeans had so much, they had much to spare and it was only reasonable that they should share something of their bounty. People with lots of "stuff" have lots to spare. "What wilt thou give me?"

But I do not think that Abram is asking for more wealth, more goods, more stuff, because God had more than him. He is asking for a person. He is asking for a specific person to inherit his wealth, an heir, someone to provide continuity for him, someone genetically linked to him. This was very important to him and he is being shown that he will get an heir, but leaving earthly goods to someone is not as important as the ultimate reward.

Of course, you could leave your estate to a son who will absolutely ruin himself with wealth, and it may have been better not to have left them a penny. The distractions of wealth, the deceitfulness of riches as it is called in the Bible, may hinder a person from knowing God, *Pro 30:8 Remove far from me vanity and lies: **give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me.*** Our Lord Himself gave this advice on wealth, *Luk 18:22 Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me. Luk 18:23 And **when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich.** Luk 18:24 And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! Luk 18:25 For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.*

"Riches" will according to this statement, be directed by the world view you possess. They may be consumed on the individual, self, or they may be used for others; an altruistic view or a selfish view of wealth. Some of us are sly and think we "give" but it is giving to salve conscience and it is just enough to keep the conscience quiet, but it is the giving of that rich ruler. We keep the greater part.

But Abram was a cheerful giver and had no problem leaving his life's work behind. He was concerned however with **WHO** got it. It is his legacy. This text puts his conversation in a more readable way, *Gen 15:1 After all these things happened, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision. God said, "Abram, don't be afraid. I will defend you and give you a great reward." Gen 15:2 But Abram said, "Lord GOD, there is nothing you can give me that will make me happy, because I have no son. My slave Eliezer from Damascus will get everything I own after I die." Gen 15:3 Abram said, "You have given me no son, so a slave born in my house will get everything I have." Gen 15:4 Then the LORD spoke to Abram and said, "That slave will not be the one to get what you have. You will have a son who will get everything you own." ERV.*

I think that it was at this point that Abram found the stirrings of Christ in his heart. He is going to be shown a great truth by this Lord who stands before him. The stirrings for an heir to his legacy, is a stirring of Christ in his soul. It was as Asaph saw, that the wicked appear to prosper but their feet are set on slippery places, and when all is said and done and he comes to his senses, there is the realisation, *Psa 73:25 Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.*

Abram must get his mind around this great mystery. How can Christ who stands before him, come from his loins and be the Seed (singular)? This is hardly comprehensible to the aged Patriarch as he stands alone before Him.

Do you remember how little you knew when Christ stood before you and laid claim to you. I imagine that you saw more of the Man than the Eternal God. He was good and gentle and He laid down His life for you and you received it, but nothing of what He really was, entered your consciousness. You read the "new testament" and found a bit about His life of some 33 years. In your mind you saw Him as a "white" man in a long robe, with a beard, working miracles, dying at the hands of Romans and rising from the dead the third day. You may have changed that picture since those days.

You did not consider what if any His relationship with the Older Testament was, in fact it was not of great concern to you then. You had a world view that enabled you to compartmentalise the daily world from the spiritual realm. Things like "types" of Christ were unknown, prophecy apart from the ones concerning His birth and death were a dark mystery. You did not actively seek Him in the Old Testament, you did not see the pivotal role He played in each book of the Old Testament. You totally failed to see Him as the Creator of all that you see. He was more than 30 years old, He was timeless, He was your Creator.

But you see more now, much more, and specifically more of Christ. Have you adjusted your position as you have grown, or just laid the knowledge on top of the things that you knew? There must be some adjustment as you grow, *2Pe 3:18 But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.* You do not wear the same baby clothes as you grow. Nature shows us the crustaceans that grow shed their shells as they become

bigger. We accommodate the increasing growth. We metamorphosise as we grow, we dissolve what we had as a caterpillar and emerge from the genetic “soup” as a butterfly.

We are not the same creatures we were years ago and although the world does not like to acknowledge the change in us, it is there. The same thing happened to faithful Abram, and it happened in stages. Firstly in the “call” of the Abram out of his father’s house, then He declared him “righteous by faith”, and then He took him to “glory”. It follows the age old path, *Rom 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are **the called** according to his purpose. Rom 8:29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate **to be conformed to the image of his Son**, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Rom 8:30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.*

Some see this as high Calvinistic doctrine, to be revered in its own right, and so men go about lauding the doctrine, which is a true teaching, but fail to see the goal of predestination. They go about arguing which of God’s decrees is superior, whether God predestines and therefore He foreknew, or because He foresees it follows He predestines. But the goal of predestination is Christ, the goal is, “**to be conformed to the image of his Son**”. If it does not lead to this conformity it is a waste of time. If the religious institutions do not get this across, it is all in vain, it is just an attempt at being clever with doctrine, clinging to that lamppost for illumination in a dark world, and failing to enter the brightness of Christ, *Mal 4:2 But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.*

If you have not been or are not going through these stages of growth you are following a god, who looks like a snake, the mythical horned beast with a forked tail and a forked tongue. You may believe in your concept of “God”, but he will not be there to deliver you. Christ alone is the deliverer, *Rom 11:26 And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:* It requires a definite “calling”, and a definite “justification” by faith alone to call yourself a Christian.

Abram in his vision is entering upon a growth phase. The spiritual realm is breaking through his earthly realm, and it is going to take over, such that the earthly realm will become less of a reality and the spiritual realm the great reality.

You may be wondering why this has not been told to you plainly? Why is it such a slog to get at the truth? It is quite obvious really, for if it was all laid out in order you would neglect it. By mining the truth out of Scripture, by hard work, by study and meditation of the sacred word, it becomes precious and it becomes yours, personally, *1Pe 2:7 Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, 1Pe 2:8 And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.*

It is also progressive revelation. In the New Testament times more was being revealed, *1Pe 1:10 Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: 1Pe 1:11 Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that*

should follow. 1Pe 1:12 Unto whom it was revealed, **that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things**, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.

Abram was given a personal revelation. Did Abram understand what he was being shown? According to Christ he did, *Joh 8:56 Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.* The word “rejoiced” means to jump for joy. *Joh 8:56 Your father Abraham leaped for joy that he should see My day, and he saw, and rejoiced.* LITV. That does not leave much doubt that Abram was overjoyed to witness Christ’s day, he saw it. What was the “day” that he saw? I shall leave this for the moment. Christ was able to look forward and to look back at Abram’s day.

Christ further informs Abram, *Gen 15:4 And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. Gen 15:5 And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.*

He is not told to look down but to “Look now toward heaven”

The scripture indicates that Abram is in the vision, but it is **day time**, which we gather from what transpires a few verses later, *Gen 15:12 And when the Sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him.* This leads to a strange thought, for the only star visible in the day is the sun, one star. But in the vision Abram sees the stars without number, so in the vision he is in the night.

The stars that Abram sees will be subsumed by the Sun of righteousness. The seed, plural, the stars, becomes the Seed, singular, the Sun. The earthly representatives of Abram which he sees as stars in the firmament, heirs without number, stars by night will be consumed by the Sun. The stars in their brightness, viewed from this earth, will be eclipsed by the brightness of the Sun. In the day of the Lord, when all things are gathered in, we shall be but one in Christ, *Gal 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.*

It is a mystery explained, *Eph 1:9 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: Eph 1:10 That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: Eph 1:11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: Eph 1:12 That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.*

The truth Abram is learning is profound and he is learning it from the Creation, and from the discipline of Astronomy. Whoever said that science and religion are two separate disciplines is mad. You cannot keep them apart, and if you try to, you will lose the truths of God. Science is a window on the Creator’s person and His works.

Abram is taught not to look for many “seeds” he is taught to look for one, the “Seed” which is singular, *Gal 3:16 Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.*

You may find it hard to believe that Christ is there in the Old Testament, but Paul says He is, and He is revealed to Abram. From an earthly position, Abram will have an innumerable number of descendants, but from a heavenly perspective he will have one descendant, who towers over these in stature. He is the Christ. And so Abram is introduced to his illustrious ancestor.

The Person standing before him, the Lord, is also the Person who will, in some future time, come and fulfil all things, and He will come out of his bowels. Abram must have been given a lot to think about. He thought that relatives were born to you and they did not surely exist before you? And this other truth, the Lord who stood before him, how could he possibly enter him and his descendents, and be born?

And above all, why choose me? A citizen of Ur, a migrant to the land of Canaan. A nobody in worldly terms. But he seized the opportunity with both hands because he believed the Person standing before him, he believed Christ, *Gen 15:6 And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.* Abram had surely won the greatest lottery in life.

It does not say that he fully understood at that point in time what was being said and the full implications of it, but he took God at His word. He did not introduce spurious arguments against what he was being shown, he did not, like the unbelievers you encounter on a daily basis laugh and dismiss the claims as irrational, he did not, as many so called “christians” compromise what he was shown and rationalise it with so called scientific “facts” which are so ephemeral. He accepted it as true.

It was on this account that God, “*counted it to him for righteousness*”. And it would not be the last time, for every time he believed God it was “*counted it to him for righteousness*”. You see, justification is not a one off, it is a state of being.

And I suppose that something else introduced itself, as the meaning of this vision dawned upon him. What was the use of earthly descendents who did not follow the Lord? What is the point of having sons and daughters who do not actively pursue Christ? How many Christians do I see, falling over themselves to avoid offending the unbelief of their families. Pandering to unbelieving children, husbands or wives, letting them, nay, encouraging them to continue the way they are going, the way of death.

They should move their thinking forward in time. If you say nothing to them you are just hastening them on their way. What happens to them, the unbelievers, when they die and what will you feel like when they are gone and it is too late. You had every opportunity to tell them the word and you did not. What does all that you possess count for now? There is one thing, a pearl of great price, that we see in faith as the only thing worth having in this world. Jesus Christ. If there is anything that you leave your descendants it must be Christ.

And if you pray for them and do nothing, if you expect God to undertake when you are prepared to do nothing, then the consequences are likely to be that they will go down to the dust in ignorance.

When Abram saw his inheritance in Christ he must have rejoiced, and as he awaits each daughter and son in the presence of God, there must be sadness as well as joy, *Luk 16:22 And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried **by the angels into Abraham's bosom**: the rich man also died, and was buried*; Abram would see the seed of Christ and that would comfort him. As to the rest of his seeds, he saw the justice of God in condemning them for their rejection of His only begotten Son, Jesus, the rejection of **The Seed**.

19. The day of Christ

I said that we would examine what it meant to see Christ's day, *Joh 8:56 **Your father Abraham rejoiced to see MY DAY: and he saw it, and was glad.** Joh 8:57 Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?* *Joh 8:58 Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, **Before Abraham was, I am.***

What was the "Day of Christ" to which He refers? I suggest it is "the Lord's Day", **NO, not Sunday**, and the term "the Lord's Day" is never used of the first day of the week in scripture. The Lord's day is revealed in Revelation by what follows. (See studies p.17 ff, 4th Command, The Messiah's In-laws, the Law of Moses <https://archive.org/details/MessiahsInlaws/page/n181/mode/2up>).

*Rev 1:10 I was in the Spirit on **the Lord's day**, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, Rev 1:11 Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea. Rev 1:12 And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; Rev 1:13 And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto **the Son of man**, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.*

It is a Day which starts by addressing the Churches, for they are the bodies which the message goes to and they are its beneficiaries. For some, they must put their house in order or suffer the consequences. Note, that these are not institutions, denominations, nations or national bodies. They are Churches surrounding Christ Who is in the centre, the trunk of a Tree of Life, the source of life for the branches. The Menorah was there in the Old Testament and so was the Church.

It is a day like no other. It is a day which encompasses all time, it is the Day of days, it is the beginning of time and it is the end of time, and all that goes between, and it is summed up as **the Day of the Lord**, for all time is His, all things are His, *Col 1:16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: Col 1:17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. Col 1:18 And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.* That is the Lord Jesus Christ the Creator.

We divide time into Anno Domini and Before Christ, A.D. and B.C. but that is wrong. We put Christ's birth at the juncture of A.D. and B.C. and count forward as the days of Christ and backwards as the days before Christ. This is not what the Bible teaches us. If Christ was at the beginning, it is all A.D., for there can be no "before Christ" because: *Joh 8:58 Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.* A better view of time is to call it the years of the world, Anno Mundi, A.M. but not B.C. for there never was a time without Christ or before Christ.

Time is the unfolding of the Governance of Christ, from beginning to end, His wars against the ungodly and His triumphs over all. It is every moment of human history put in perspective. It is the Bible brought to life, chapter by chapter; in fact we might view the book of Revelation as a synopsis of the whole Bible. From the beginning, from Genesis, when mankind was young, *Hos 11:1 When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt. Hos 11:2 As they called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images. Hos 11:3 I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them. Hos 11:4 I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them. Hos 11:5 He shall not return into the land of Egypt, but the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return.*

Abram was shown the history of his people, through the birth pangs of the Nation, to the destruction of that earthly nation, through to the end of time, when Christ would return. He would see the devil trying to swallow the Church whole but he would never win over Christ. He would see the succession of wars, killing millions in the name of humanistic ideology, and he would see Christ triumphant. No wonder Abram rejoiced, he jumped for joy.

Humanity are like ants before Almighty God, insignificant little creatures and they can scarce see their own small moment in time, let alone fit it into the ages of man. They pontificate over their life and times, but God outlasts them all and Christ outshines them. But He who sits above all, is all to us, *Isa 40:21 Have ye not known? have ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth? Isa 40:22 It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in: Isa 40:23 That bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity. Isa 40:24 Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown: yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth: and he shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble. Isa 40:25 To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One.*

Indeed who will we liken Him to? As I go on and study the Bible, I find that my understanding of God is far too small and limiting. He is of immense power and might, *Jer 32:17 Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee:* Why is this so difficult for people to understand?

The natural men do not hold that God is able to make the world and the universe in six, 24 hour days, which He clearly says He does, because they hang on the words of man and put his thoughts above God's thoughts. They do not believe the account of Noah, *2Pe 3:5 For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the*

water and in the water: 2Pe 3:6 Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: 2Pe 3:7 But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

Their view of the Lord is too constraining. But a God, for whom nothing is too difficult, should be an end of the matter. There is no discussion allowed as to whether He is capable or if He has done it. And if a person claims to have been born again: *1Pe 1:23 Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, **by the word of God**, which liveth and abideth for ever*, then they should see that same word as bringing the Flood, *2Pe 3:5 For this they willingly are ignorant of, that **by the word of God** the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water*: If there was no Flood brought about by the Word of God, then there is no new birth by the Word of God.

When Jesus speaks of Abram to the Jews it is against the background of sleights, untruths and humanistic reason, *Joh 8:48 Then answered the Jews, and said unto him, Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil? Joh 8:49 Jesus answered, I have not a devil; but I honour my Father, and ye do dishonour me. Joh 8:50 And I seek not mine own glory: there is one that seeketh and judgeth. Joh 8:51 Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death. Joh 8:52 Then said the Jews unto him, Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death. Joh 8:53 Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom makest thou thyself? Joh 8:54 Jesus answered, If I honour myself, my honour is nothing: it is my Father that honoureth me; of whom ye say, that he is your God: Joh 8:55 Yet ye have not known him; but I know him: and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but I know him, and keep his saying. Joh 8:56 Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. Joh 8:57 Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Joh 8:58 Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.*

In Jesus' world view, there is a living afterlife, *Mat 22:29 Jesus answered and said unto them, **Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.** Mat 22:30 For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. Mat 22:31 But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, Mat 22:32 I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? **God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.*** They failed both to understand the power of God and they did not know the scripture. A Mighty God and miserable man go head to head but there is no contest.

In God there appears to be timelessness. He is living, "existing", if I can use that word respectfully, beyond the world in which we are in, among us but not of this substance, *Act 17:28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being*; We are the slaves to the progression of life. We cannot comprehend His "world" and it is shown to us by metaphors and similes. The danger is that we attempt to box God in and when we have got a manageable concept we stop looking for Him.

But He is unbounded by anything we do, *Isa 46:10 Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my*

pleasure: So if God declares what shall be and the things not yet done, how does He do it? When Abram gazes into the future, what makes the future a certainty?

Some Christians say God has foreknowledge, and of the infinite number of outcomes He just happens to see the right one, time and time again. Well that is true, He does see the right outcomes, but only because He directs the outcomes. *Act 2:23 Him, being **delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God**, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:*

The determinate council precedes foreknowledge in our “forward time directional universe”, but I suspect we will learn differently when we are taken to glory, and when time is no more, *Rev 10:5 And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, Rev 10:6 And swear by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, **that there should be time no longer***: What replaces time but existence?

Your “god”, as an unbeliever, may have limitations, but our God does not. Your limitations are all because of your misunderstanding of omniscience and making man in your image. We have not got a clue, *Isa 55:8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. Isa 55:9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, **so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts***. And as the Apostle Paul says, *Rom 11:33 O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! **how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!***

How did Abram see a future that had not yet happened? How did Abram make sense of the distant future with its technology, warfare, medicine, new diseases and media, going from printing press to electronic communication channels? Why did he not leave his generations with an insight into what would come upon the earth? Well we might have been desirous to know what it was like to come back from the dead but Lazarus was silent on the matter. Such curiosities are not in the remit of scripture and God has shut the page upon them. In looking upon Christ’s Day, Abram was like a traveller in time. He saw the generations to come, their life and death struggles with sin, their apostasy, and the triumph of the remnant. He saw sin in all its ugliness.

If he saw all of this, what should be the outcome for us Christians? What he did, does indeed impact us and we have a link of faith with him, *Rom 4:23 Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; Rom 4:24 But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Rom 4:25 Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification*. We are declared just with Abram and heirs according to the promise, *Gal 3:29 And **if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed**, and heirs according to the promise*.

So the promise was not to Abram alone, but to us who believe, *Gal 3:9 So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham*. In a sense, I was there in the mind of God and saw Christ and received just the same promises. You too were there and received the promises, for what is true of Abram is true to YOU and ME. Abram does not do these things in isolation from us because we are all ONE, *Gal 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male*

*nor female: for **ye are all one in Christ Jesus**. Gal 3:29 And if ye be Christ's, **then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.***

What are we then? We are not weak and snivelling creatures, apologetic for our faith, *Rom 8:37 Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. Rom 8:38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Rom 8:39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, **which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

We are now the Priests, Kings, and Conquerors that He has created, *Rev 1:6 And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.* You and I are those souls. Whatever our circumstances now, none the less we carry ourselves with the bearing of Kings, Priests, Conquerors, for we are those people. We shall not become them, we are them, NOW, so we should live up to the expectation that Jesus has of us. If you cannot live it now, how will you live it then?

In this pandemic (Corona virus 19/2/2021), I have read of the poor souls without Christ who despair and have no hope, they are suicidal and full of fear. They do not have what you and I do, so do not complain about your lot, you have nothing to complain of or be fearful of, get over yourself. You may have a crippled body, be weak, have an infirmity, be poor, but as Paul says: *2Co 4:8 We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 2Co 4:9 Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; 2Co 4:10 Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. 2Co 4:11 For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. 2Co 4:12 So **then death worketh in us, but life in you.***

Paul has a message of hope and so we should live up to it, not complaining about our lot. We are Kings and Priests not slaves and outcasts. If we see life as Christ showed Abram, the beacon in the future will guide us, that is, the Great Reward of Christ, we too will rejoice at seeing His Day.

When at last we go, will we die well? According to his people, Wesley did. On his deathbed, fading fast, with all the strength he could summon, Wesley suddenly called out, "The best of all is, God is with us." Then, raising his hand slightly and waving it in triumph, he exclaimed again with thrilling effect, "The best of all is, God is with us." If He was with you on the day when you came to the Lord, He will certainly be there at the last day.

But also notice that not only did Abram see the Day of Christ he was also rewarded. It is not that Abram just gets into that Day of Christ but he gets a bonus. On top of everything, eternal life, he gets Christ the reward.

20. From Ur to Eternity

Gen 15:7 And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it.

Why does God keep saying this? *Gen 12:7 And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him. Gen 13:14 And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: Gen 13:15 For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.*

You, O Lord have given me your word, you have said it once and that is enough. I get it, I will inherit the land. Why do you repeat yourself? He must think about this because the Lord does not speak for nothing. This is the third time the promise had been given.

It is given many, many other times in scripture after this event, *Gen 17:8 And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God..... Gen 24:7 The LORD God of heaven, which took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land; he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence..... Gen 26:3 Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father..... Exo 32:13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever..... Deu 1:8 Behold, I have set the land before you: go in and possess the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give unto them and to their seed after them..... Deu 11:9 and that ye may prolong your days in the land, which the LORD sware unto your fathers to give unto them and to their seed, a land that floweth with milk and honey.*

It was a comforting reassurance that God said it many times, but perhaps He said it many times to make Abram think about it. Was it unconditional? Well, it was not up to Abram, so the promise was **given** to him. But did the promise come with “strings attached”? A warning is sent to Israel in the book of Deuteronomy.

*Deu 9:4 Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the LORD thy God hath cast them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness the LORD hath brought me in to possess this land: but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD doth drive them out from before thee. Deu 9:5 **Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart,** dost thou go to possess their land: but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that he may perform the word which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Deu 9:6 Understand therefore, that the LORD thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiffnecked people.*

It gets worse. They were to get plagues and sickness if they were disobedient, *Deu 29:22 So that the generation to come of your children that shall rise up after you, and the stranger that shall come*

*from a far land, shall say, when they see the plagues of that land, and the sicknesses which the LORD hath laid upon it;Deu 29:23 And that the whole land thereof is brimstone, and salt, and burning, that it is not sown, nor beareth, nor any grass groweth therein, like the overthrow of Sodom, and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, which the LORD overthrew in his anger, and in his wrath: Deu 29:24 Even all nations shall say, Wherefore hath the LORD done thus unto this land? what meaneth the heat of this great anger? Deu 29:25 **Then men shall say, Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD God of their fathers, which he made with them when he brought them forth out of the land of Egypt:** Deu 29:26 For they went and served other gods, and worshipped them, gods whom they knew not, and whom he had not given unto them: Deu 29:27 And the anger of the LORD was kindled against this land, to bring upon it all the curses that are written in this book:*

It was to issue in a final warning, at the dedication of the first Temple, 1Ki 9:6 But if ye shall at all turn from following me, ye or your children, and will not keep my commandments and my statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods, and worship them: 1Ki 9:7 Then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them; and this house, which I have hallowed for my name, will I cast out of my sight; and Israel shall be a proverb and a byword among all people: 1Ki 9:8 And at this house, which is high, every one that passeth by it shall be astonished, and shall hiss; and they shall say, Why hath the LORD done thus unto this land, and to this house? 1Ki 9:9 And they shall answer, Because they forsook the LORD their God, who brought forth their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and have taken hold upon other gods, and have worshipped them, and served them: therefore hath the LORD brought upon them all this evil.

They did not heed God's warning and the result was destruction, Jer 9:9 Shall I not visit them for these things? saith the LORD: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this? Jer 9:11 And I will make Jerusalem heaps, and a den of dragons; and I will make the cities of Judah desolate, without an inhabitant. Jer 9:12 Who is the wise man, that may understand this? and who is he to whom the mouth of the LORD hath spoken, that he may declare it, for what the land perisheth and is burned up like a wilderness, that none passeth through? Jer 9:13 And the LORD saith, Because they have forsaken my law which I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice, neither walked therein; Jer 9:14 But have walked after the imagination of their own heart, and after Baalim, which their fathers taught Jer 9:15 Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will feed them, even this people, with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink. Jer 9:16 I will scatter them also among the heathen, whom neither they nor their fathers have known: and I will send a sword after them, till I have consumed them. Jer 9:19 For a voice of wailing is heard out of Zion, How are we spoiled! we are greatly confounded, because we have forsaken the land, because our dwellings have cast us out. Jer 9:20 Yet hear the word of the LORD, O ye women, and let your ear receive the word of his mouth, and teach your daughters wailing, and every one her neighbour lamentation. Jer 9:21 For death is come up into our windows, and is entered into our palaces, to cut off the children from without, and the young men from the streets. Jer 9:22 Speak, Thus saith the LORD, Even the carcasses of men shall fall as dung upon the open field, and as the handful after the harvestman, and none shall gather them.

From a bright start with Abram, the nation ran down hill. We see many of the Churches heading in the same direction. I had a thought, that the various denominations are very similar to the nation of Israel. They have their religious leaders, sometimes these are priests, sometimes they dress

differently to their congregations, they are in the main funded by the people and often the “tithe” is taken as a means of funding them. I note that not once does the New Testament appeal to the tithe in Christian giving (the New Testament begins at the Cross). Basically the minister(s) lead the congregations, which is similar to the priests of old Israel.

There is one major difference. They are impermeable to change today because the people that speak against their evils do not get heard, they do not shift their course by one degree and they do not accept the warnings given them. They are a law to themselves and not under Christ, the Head of the Church. It is a shame that we do not see the Institutions of religion, i.e. the Catholic Church, the Church of England, the Baptists etc, judge themselves by the Old Testament words. When will any Church face up to the truth and examine itself?

The Book of Revelation, having introduced Christ to us, turns to the Churches to issue rebuke, correction and encouragement. We always presume things are rosy in the garden and never once consider that we might need to change. There is always a neglect of self examination, the thought that we are right and need no rebuke and that everyone else is wrong. It is typical of the Pharisees.

The case of Ravi Zacharias is typical, as reported in Christianity Today:

When he died in May (2020) he was praised for his faithful witness, his commitment to the truth, and his personal integrity. Now it is clear that, offstage, the man so long admired by Christians around the world abused numerous women and manipulated those around him to turn a blind eye.

The RZIM board released a statement alongside the investigation expressing regret and taking some responsibility: “Ravi engaged in a series of extensive measures to conceal his behaviour from his family, colleagues, and friends. However, we also recognize that in situations of prolonged abuse, there often exist significant structural, policy, and cultural problems. ... We were trusted by our staff, our donors, and the public to mentor, oversee, and ensure the accountability of Ravi Zacharias, and in this we have failed.”

Zacharias was a law to himself and it is sad that we Christians are sprayed with the muck of his passing, but we too do much to bring Christ name down and should spend a few moments thinking about that. Zacharias continued to hide the deceit and went on to try and convince men of his righteousness. It is correct that the governing board should assume corporate responsibility, but they were so enthralled to the man that they believed him over an accuser. What is their role in the crime? You cannot hide behind the institution and suddenly drop it when things go wrong.

You cannot say I will have the good bits of the Institution and just disagree with the bad bits. You have to excise the bad bits and where you cannot cut them out you have to seriously consider getting out from it, *2Co 6:14 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? 2Co 6:15 And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? 2Co 6:16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their*

God, and they shall be my people. 2Co 6:17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, 2Co 6:18 And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

If they persist in accepting the things that are wrong, they are self professed unbelievers and they put your souls in jeopardy. If they persist and do not repent you must get out, *1Co 5:11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. 1Co 5:12 For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? 1Co 5:13 But them that are without God judgeth. **Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.***

Are these Institutions too big for God to pull down? What happened to Israel in the Old Testament? They were finally diminished then cast away, *1Ki 14:22 And Judah did evil in the sight of the LORD, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins which they had committed, above all that their fathers had done. 1Ki 14:23 For they also built them high places, and images, and groves, on every high hill, and under every green tree. 1Ki 14:24 And there were also sodomites in the land: and they did according to all the abominations of the nations which the LORD cast out before the children of Israel. 1Ki 14:25 And it came to pass in the fifth year of king Rehoboam, that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem: 1Ki 14:26 And he took away the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house; he even took away all: and he took away all the shields of gold which Solomon had made.*

Our “church” Institutions are like Israel with this difference, they do not “appear” to be under judgement, and because of this they go on in the same way, heaping up to themselves judgement. Take for example, Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, head of the Church of England, who is the arch compromiser on the subject of homosexuality, *1Co 14:8 For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?* Welby and the Church of England would have been condemned under the Old Testament, been punished and eventually cast away. They are not, and everyone in that organisation thinks that they are all right because heaven is silent. Your “Church” might be silent, but that does not mean you are right or have escaped judgement. If you do not put evil way, you will be put away.

But why are we not told? **Well we have been if you were paying attention.** The seven Churches show Christ’s concern for righteousness and His last utterance to us is given in the last book of the Scripture. Only two Churches escape His censure, Smyrna and Philadelphia. Instead of following men and their position, you should be thinking of Christ, *Col 1:17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. Col 1:18 And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; **that in all things he might have the preeminence.***

It is crazy that men come up with the ideas that they do and say that God told them to do it, even when it contradicts Christ. These disobedient men in our day, are of the same stock as the Jews of Pauls day, and they are incorrigible, but eventually time ran out for them, *Act 7:48 Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Act 7:49 Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of*

*my rest? Act 7:50 Hath not my hand made all these things? Act 7:51 Ye **stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.** Act 7:52 Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Act 7:53 Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.*

Abram and his descendents had an **earthly** promise but it was conditional upon obedience. The earthly promise was for the duration of life or disobedience, whichever came first, and then what? The earthly inheritance is not much use to Abram in a graveyard. Abram will not walk up and down the land God promised him, in death, he will not see his earthly seed, he will not see as his earthly eyes have rotted along with the rest of him. The promise of a grave is not worth much. Job, who speaks possibly about the same time, says: Job 19:25 *For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth:* Job 19:26 *And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God:* He being dead speaks of a future “**in his flesh**”, the same word used in Genesis for the closing of the “flesh” in Adams rib. He would be raised from the dead in the flesh, 1Co 15:38 *But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body.*

The Old Testament predominates with the promises of this life, but in the New Testament the emphasis shifts to the afterlife, the realm of the Spirit, to Heaven itself. Israel had come to its end due to disobedience. Where then did the Hope of Israel lie? It lay in Christ, as the Apostle says, “Jerusalem above is free”, Gal 4:22 *For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. Gal 4:23 But **he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise.** Gal 4:24 Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. Gal 4:25 For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. Gal 4:26 **But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.***

So Abram had earthly promises, but since these were given to a dying body, the Jerusalem above went beyond that, and I believe he looked to this City, the City of God. He went from Ur to Eternity.

21. In Christ alone

We have settled a fundamental truth of interpretation of Scripture. Stated simply it is that “**Christ is the key which opens the Scripture**”. He is throughout the Bible and we will find Him if we look and find answers to our questions in Him. We saw that He was key to understanding the “seed”, Gal 3:16 *Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.* We shall use this principle as we go forward and look at the meaning of the sacrifice before us. We shall try and interpret it in Christ alone.

Gen 15:9 And he said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon.

It is interesting why the Lord chose this answer to Abram’s question, Gen 15:8 *And he said, My Lord Jehovah, by what shall I know that I shall inherit it?* LITV. The method used to show Abram that he

would inherit was by a sacrifice. God could have said, “here is the future, here is a vision of your children going into the land of the Canaanites having trekked out of Egypt”. God could have given him a vision from heaven but God shows him instead, **a sacrifice**.

The five animals that the Lord shows to Abram are the answer to his request. Why does God show him these and what do they signify? **A heifer, a she goat, a ram, a turtledove, and a pigeon**. They all have something to do with Christ and we shall explore them in turn. They are used as sacrifices and we shall look at the major occurrences of them starting with the smallest and going up to the largest.

The dove and pigeon. *Lev 12:1 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Lev 12:2 Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a woman have conceived seed, and born a man child: then she shall be unclean seven days; according to the days of the separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean. Lev 12:3 And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. Lev 12:4 And she shall then continue in the blood of her purifying three and thirty days; she shall touch no hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purifying be fulfilled. Lev 12:5 But if she bear a maid child, then she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her separation: and she shall continue in the blood of her purifying threescore and six days. Lev 12:6 And when the days of her purifying are fulfilled, for a son, or for a daughter, she shall bring a lamb of the first year for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon, or a turtledove, for a sin offering, unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, unto the priest: Lev 12:7 Who shall offer it before the LORD, and make an atonement for her; and she shall be cleansed from the issue of her blood. This is the law for her that hath born a male or a female. Lev 12:8 And if she be not able to bring a lamb, then she shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons; the one for the burnt offering, and the other for a sin offering: and the priest shall make an atonement for her, and she shall be clean.*

The birds were given as atonement for the mother, for her ceremonial uncleanness. Either a dove or a pigeon were offered, *Luk 2:24 And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons*. The implication is that something about the birth, not the pregnancy, made her unclean, 7 + 33 days for a boy, 14 + 66 days for a girl. The implications are that the girl was twice as unclean as the boy and made the purification longer.

There are no intermediate sexes here, only boys and girls, male and female. The transgender person does not exist in Gods eyes. The birds were killed for the mother .

A Ram of three years. Three years is according to some the full grown strength of the creature and its maturity and it is to be distinguished from the Levitical offerings of a one year old. The primary use of the animal came to the fore in the “Consecration of the Priests”, Exodus chapter 29.

Exo 29:15 Thou shalt also take one ram; and Aaron and his sons shall put their hands upon the head of the ram. Exo 29:16 And thou shalt slay the ram, and thou shalt take his blood, and sprinkle it round about upon the altar. Exo 29:17 And thou shalt cut the ram in pieces, and wash the inwards of him, and his legs, and put them unto his pieces, and unto his head. Exo 29:18 And thou shalt burn the whole ram upon the altar: it is a burnt offering unto the LORD: it is a sweet savour, an offering made by fire unto the LORD. Exo 29:19 And thou shalt take the other ram; and Aaron and his sons shall put their hands upon the head of the ram. Exo 29:20 Then shalt thou kill the ram, and take of his blood, and put it upon the tip of the right ear of Aaron, and upon the tip of the right ear of his

sons, and upon the thumb of their right hand, and upon the great toe of their right foot, and sprinkle the blood upon the altar round about. Exo 29:21 And thou shalt take of the blood that is upon the altar, and of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it upon Aaron, and upon his garments, and upon his sons, and upon the garments of his sons with him: and he shall be hallowed, and his garments, and his sons, and his sons' garments with him. Exo 29:22 Also thou shalt take of the ram the fat and the rump, and the fat that covereth the inwards, and the caul above the liver, and the two kidneys, and the fat that is upon them, and the right shoulder; for it is a ram of consecration: Exo 29:23 And one loaf of bread, and one cake of oiled bread, and one wafer out of the basket of the unleavened bread that is before the LORD: Exo 29:24 And thou shalt put all in the hands of Aaron, and in the hands of his sons; and shalt wave them for a wave offering before the LORD. Exo 29:25 And thou shalt receive them of their hands, and burn them upon the altar for a burnt offering, for a sweet savour before the LORD: it is an offering made by fire unto the LORD. Exo 29:26 And thou shalt take the breast of the ram of Aaron's consecration, and wave it for a wave offering before the LORD: and it shall be thy part.

Christ as it were, in a type, consecrates the priests. It was an earthly shadow of a heavenly reality, Heb 8:2 *A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.* Heb 8:3 *For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer.* Heb 8:4 *For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law:* Heb 8:5 *Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.* Heb 8:6 *But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.* He consecrates you and I as priests and kings, and He is set apart for the work as the Great High Priest.

A goat of three years. This sacrifice is offered on the Day of Atonement, Lev 16:6 *And Aaron shall offer his bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and make an atonement for himself, and for his house.* Lev 16:7 *And he shall take **the two goats**, and present them before the LORD at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.* Lev 16:8 *And **Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the LORD, and the other lot for the scapegoat.*** Lev 16:9 *And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the LORD'S lot fell, and offer him for a sin offering.* Lev 16:10 *But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat, shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make an atonement with him, and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness.*

Two goats are given, I think, to make a distinction between the sin offering and the taking away of sins, Lev 16:15 *Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering, that is for the people, and bring his blood within the vail, and do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat:* Lev 16:16 ***And he shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins: and so shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation, that remaineth among them in the midst of their uncleanness.....*** Lev 16:20 *And when he hath made an end of reconciling the holy place, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat:* Lev 16:21 *And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, **and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon***

the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness: Lev 16:22 And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness. Lev 16:23 And Aaron shall come into the tabernacle of the congregation, and shall put off the linen garments, which he put on when he went into the holy place, and shall leave them there:

It is summed up by these verses: *Heb 13:10 We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle. Heb 13:11 For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Heb 13:12 Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Heb 13:13 Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.*

Christ bears the Sin and the Reproaches, and we bear the reproaches of Him. In His humility he bore our sins far away from the camp.

The cow of three years old. The laws for Purification use a red heifer, perhaps drawing us back to the first sin of Adam, because the word for red is adam, *Num 19:2 This is the ordinance of the law which the LORD hath commanded, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring thee a red heifer without spot, wherein is no blemish, and upon which never came yoke: Num 19:3 And ye shall give her unto Eleazar the priest, that he may bring her forth without the camp, and one shall slay her before his face: Num 19:4 And Eleazar the priest shall take of her blood with his finger, and sprinkle of her blood directly before the tabernacle of the congregation seven times: Num 19:5 And one shall burn the heifer in his sight; her skin, and her flesh, and her blood, with her dung, shall he burn: Num 19:6 And the priest shall take cedar wood, and hyssop, and scarlet, and cast it into the midst of the burning of the heifer. Num 19:7 Then the priest shall wash his clothes, and he shall bathe his flesh in water, and afterward he shall come into the camp, and the priest shall be unclean until the even. Num 19:8 And he that burneth her shall wash his clothes in water, and bathe his flesh in water, and shall be unclean until the even. Num 19:9 And a man that is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and lay them up without the camp in a clean place, and it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for a water of separation: it is a purification for sin.*

This is clearly brought to mind in the New Testament, *Heb 9:13 For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: Heb 9:14 How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*

In the Old Testament, the works which the Law ordained were “dead works”, as far as the conscience was concerned. The offerings had to be repeated year after year, but in Christ the conscience is purged of dead works to serve the living God. In one act, by His death, the sin is forgiven together with the consciousness of it, *Heb 10:12 But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; Heb 10:13 From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. Heb 10:14 For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.*

In these sacrifices, which get their meaning from the Glories of Christ, we see Him saving the mother and child, in the atonement, in the scapegoat, in the sprinkling for sin, in the consecration of the

priests and the cleansing of the tabernacle. All those sacrifices told a story about Christ's work for His people.

Did Abram understand these sacrifices and their typical meaning? We have developed our understanding over years of study, with the advantage of hindsight, with the New Testament explanations that make the Old Testament so much clearer, with the commentaries that have tried to clarify events for us. How can we possibly think that Abram saw things as we do?

I think that he did see but also the meaning of what he saw became clearer over time. For example, he had the Lord, Jehovah, which is Christ, appear to him on numerous occasions. He spoke with God, and asked Him questions, as he did here, and in his prayers of intercession for Lot. I am sure many of his conversations with his Maker are not recorded but they would have touched on the things he was not clear upon. It is just like you and me asking God certain personal questions and receiving our private answers.

It was not only in conversation that he received instruction, it was by the things that happened to him, the events of life, and we have an example before us. The vision of the heavens, the multitude of seed, as the stars, held another meaning, which he probed and in consequence saw Christ as the Seed. Did he see it at the time or later, who knows, but Jesus said that he rejoiced to see Christ's day, *Joh 8:56 Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.*

For Abram, this is a lot to take in, in one go, and it is no wonder that he has a horror of great darkness, at what God shows him next. Young translates it "a terror" of great darkness, the dark night of the soul, but we shall come to this in due course. Abram is learning, and was by all accounts a good pupil and friend of Christ, so much so that he is trusted with the position of the chief "Meeter and Greeter" in heaven, *Luk 16:22 And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; Luk 16:23 And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.*

That one offering contained many facets. Jesus Christ had one life and one death, but the way to death lit up like a diamond and showed the manifold wisdom of God in it. It was necessary because the Lord would teach His people the sinfulness of sin, how broad its grasp, how deceitful it behaved, how deep it penetrated the soul, how much it had permeated the human condition and how lost we were as a result.

We do not see the Cross for what it is and so we need teaching. What better way to teach us than with something we are familiar, with our domestic animals, clean and unclean, the small creatures that we scarcely notice, the wild creatures that we contend with, the beasts of which we are one. Gradually the work of the Cross was revealed by God. From the lamb of Abel, the sheep of Noah, to the creatures of Abram.

Abram is not viewing dead animals when he sees the 5 creatures, and takes them for an offering. The natural man may see animals, but Abram saw beyond that. God was showing Abram the Cross, He was showing him the Saviour of mankind using the similitude of animals. God did something similar when He revealed the Saviour to the Baptist, who said: *Joh 1:29 The next day John seeth*

Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. Abram is seeing the death of Christ before his eyes.

To be of real meaning to him, Abram must see the animals brought together in one meaning. That meaning is the Cross, the death of Christ, but a death alone holds no certainty for the future. If he saw Christ's death it would leave him alone, it would leave us alone, but if the sacrifice lived again that would be a different matter, *Rom 4:23 Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; Rom 4:24 But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Rom 4:25 Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.* Now Abram has a hope for the future, and so do we.

Abram takes the animals and divides the cow, goat and ram but not the pigeon and dove. It seems that Abram killed the animals, and just as with Jesus, mankind was responsible for His death, *Act 4:26 The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. Act 4:27 For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, Act 4:28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.*

Abram has seen the stars, he has seen his seed, Christ, he has killed the sacrifice, now he will not only see Christ's death, he will enter into it and be part of it.

22. The death of death

The Lord has spoken to Abram in answer to two questions, which are as much for our sake as his. He asks, "What will you give me?" and, "By what shall I know I shall inherit it?" The answer to the first question is in the stars, it is Christ, the seed. God is giving him the greatest treasure ever known, **Christ**. The answer to the second is more complicated and involves sacrifice, but that is not all it involves. We pick up the story.

As Abram sets the pieces of carcase in order, the raptors descend on them, *Gen 15:11 And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away. Gen 15:12 And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him.*

God approaches Abram in a Vision for the first part of the communication, which probably explains why it happened in the day and yet he saw the stars. He appears in a wakened state for the second part of the communication but during it falls into a deep sleep after driving the ravenous birds away.

I do not know exactly what the birds, the hawks, signify. There are two things that come to mind however. Abram actively chases them away, he does not leave them and this implies that the birds were malevolent and he knew it. They were there to feast upon the sacrifice and take away from it, thus reducing its efficacy. And secondly there was Abram's involvement with the sacrifice, not as a passive onlooker but actively involved in the preservation of the sacrifice.

We too must drive the hawks of satan away from the sacrifice. In a day which sees the constant undermining of Christ's sacrificial death we must stand. Senator Raphael Warnock (D-GA), who is

also the senior pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church, sparked a controversy with his Easter Sunday tweet stating that Christ's resurrection transcends to helping people. "The meaning of Easter is more transcendent than the resurrection of Jesus Christ. **Whether you are Christian or not, through a commitment to helping others we are able to save ourselves,**" wrote Warnock, which he eventually deleted after receiving backlash from several conservatives, reports Christian Headlines.

"With all due respect, this is literally the opposite of what the Gospel says. Ephesians 2 states that clearly. Faith alone, Christ alone," tweeted Jason Romano. "Love God, Love others. We should always help others. But ... that's [not] how we're saved. Romans, Ephesians, the Gospels all make it clear we can't save ourselves. If we could, then Jesus died on the cross for nothing." So according to this pastor Warnock, you can save yourself, you do not need Christ. Thank God for those who got him to delete the message.

When Abram had successfully driven the hawks away and when the evening was upon him, he felt tired, so tired that he fell in a deep sleep. The same phrase is used of Adam when the Lord was about to make Eve from a rib, *Gen 2:21 And the LORD God caused **a deep sleep to fall upon Adam**, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; Gen 2:22 And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. Gen 2:23 And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.*

It is a deep sleep but not, I think, a sleep lacking awareness. I say this, because although Adam was in the sleeping state, he was not surprised when waking, to find the woman there. It is as if he was expecting her, *Gen 2:23 And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.* He knew that in his deep sleep state, that she was taken from him.

It is a sleep that you often hear about in medical operations, were the person has a consciousness of the procedure.

Very rarely, in only one or two of every 1,000 medical procedures involving general anaesthesia, a patient may become aware or conscious. The condition, called anaesthesia awareness (waking up) during surgery, means the patient can recall their surroundings, or an event related to the surgery, while under general anaesthesia. Although it can be upsetting, patients usually do not feel pain when experiencing anaesthesia awareness.

Anaesthesia awareness is not the same as remembering some activities surrounding your procedure, such as something that happened just before the anaesthesia started working or when its effects began to wear off after surgery. This is normal. You might even dream during surgery and only think you experienced awareness.

People who have experienced awareness under anaesthesia report different levels of awareness. Some people have brief, vague recollections. Others remember a specific moment of surgery or their surroundings. In some cases, people recall a feeling of pressure.

So Abraham was in a deep sleep state, not necessarily unconscious and this prepares him for what is to come, it anaesthetises him for what is "a terror of great darkness falling upon him". What did the terror consist of? The darkness only or did it the darkness stand for something?

In beginning there was darkness but darkness had already entered the realm of God's creatures, *Gen 1:1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. Gen 1:2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.* The angels sinned before the Creation, and there is no record of this fall during the time of mankind, in fact satan had already launched his counterattack on God. We read: *Jud 1:6 And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.*

The Lord may have made the Creation in response to this falling away of the angelic beings. He may have made it out of darkness to show that out of a race of men that would fall, yet there would arise some who would be faithful to their Creator, some would choose to come out of the darkness. *1Pe 2:9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath **called you out of darkness into his marvellous light**:* Given the right leader, a Saviour, they would overcome and they would be God's people. Whatever the reason, the world was made in darkness, the darkness of night, *Gen 1:5 And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.*

The darkness was pierced with the light of Christ, *Joh 1:4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men. Joh 1:5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.* Darkness is associated with death and light with Christ, *Isa 9:2 The people **that walked in darkness** have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of **the shadow of death**, upon them hath the light shined.* By the same token those who are cut off in darkness, experience separation from God.

So Abram experienced the darkness of death and being separated from God. Like a man being buried alive, the coffin lid closes, leaving him in absolute darkness, he is frozen in fear, he cannot move, he is paralysed. All manner of thoughts pass through his head, the inescapable black horror surrounds him, he cannot scream, he is like an insect caught in a poisonous spiders web, immobilised but fully aware of his circumstance. It must have taken Abram by surprise. He had not expected this, after all, it was a simple question he asked about his generations, and yet it involved this horror.

Why? Why did it involve the killing of these animals and splitting them apart, why did it involve the horror of darkness, what was it that brought him to this situation? Was he going to have to suffer all this or were his seed going to suffer it, or was it another "seed"? Adam had an experience of the deep sleep, *Gen 2:21 And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof;*

Adam was a type of Christ and Abram was a type of Christ, and their deep sleeps pre-figured His own sleep of death, the last enemy. Eve was created out of that deep sleep of Adam, the Nation was created out of Abram's deep sleep and when Christ slept in death on the cross and in the tomb, death and hell were judged, and a **Heavenly nation was born**. Abram experienced the death of Christ.

This is true of every son of God, they must taste the death of Christ, *Joh 6:53 Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Joh 6:54 Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.*

We celebrate the Lord's table for this purpose, remembering His death, lest we forget, *1Co 11:24 And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. 1Co 11:25 After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.*

You cannot view the death of Christ as a mere intellectual object, a creed, something you say on a Sunday morning but have no knowledge of the person. I remember Sundays in the Anglican Church where we would say the Apostles Creed, "I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead." I said it, and after a few times it became automatic, but if you had asked me about that belief, in Jesus Christ, I would have been stumped. I knew about Him, based on the beliefs of others but I did not know Him personally. I did not "know His death".

I had not been brought to that point where I knew about Him and His death from a personal viewpoint, I only knew it from the position of others who registered their thoughts and ideas in Creeds.

I heard a definition of Democracy and Christocracy the other day which is very appropriate to what I am saying. In a Democracy you choose the rulers, you vote for leaders, you are in charge of who gets to power. In a Christocracy, you **do not** get to choose who is in charge, you do not get a vote, **you are chosen to be a citizen** but you have no right to choose the King.

This highlights the difference between Christianity and the modernist view of religion. Christianity is not democratic, that is a Greek pagan idea. Christianity is Theocratic, with Christ ruling and His word being obeyed. If you have a view, that you can make the scriptures believe a world view that allows for choice, in which you are King, you are wrong. If you just want a Christ to "rubber stamp" your requests and actions, regardless of Scripture, you are in for a surprise. That is not Christianity. The Law of the King is absolute.

This returns me to the idea that I put forward. You can know of Jesus, and who He is and what He did and yet not know **Him** as a person. You think that you do, but when you lack faith and live a pseudo-religious life in consequence, a hypocrisy, not knowing the certainty of anything, you cannot know Him personally. There are thousands of people like that. But, as Paul says: *Php 3:10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; Php 3:11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.* He wants to know, **"the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death"**.

There comes a time when God calls and you begin to know about His death. You do not understand it fully but you are coming to know it. Paul is decades in the faith and still cries: *“That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection”*. There is so much to learn. Christianity is not a badge you pin on the outside, it is a work of God pinned on the heart.

Abram knew Christ and he rejoiced and was glad, and Christ acknowledged him, both in his day and in the future, when he had long decomposed to dust, but he was not dead. *Luk 20:36 Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection. Luk 20:37 Now that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when he calleth **the Lord the God of Abraham**, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Luk 20:38 For he is not a God of the dead, **but of the living**: for all live unto him.*

Christians can take comfort in that. When this life is finished, done and dusted, life can begin, life not as we know it. All the darkness that you see around you, the hopelessness, the godlessness is gone and no more to be seen.

As you have been changed by Christ and the particular experiences that He gives you, you are being prepared for that Glory. Each one of us is different but equally precious, like jewels, *Mal 3:16 Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. Mal 3:17 And **they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels**; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Mal 3:18 Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.*

The “horror of great darkness”, was for Abram, and for you and me not the end of the story, it is the beginning. We all go through that darkness but then there is the Light of the World, welcoming us. Equally it is true of the unbeliever that they go through darkness but for them it never ends. The world of darkness in which they lived, becomes their forever world. *Luk 16:23 And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Luk 16:24 And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. Luk 16:25 But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.*

There is a saying, “Be careful what you pray for. You just might get it.” When Abram prayed for an heir, he did not think it would take him on such a frightening journey. One might say, to hell and back.

23. The Covenant with Christ

*Gen 15:18 In the same day the LORD made a **covenant with** Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates:*

This is the second covenant the Lord made with men. The first was with Noah and the Earth and all living creatures,. *Gen 9:12 And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: Gen 9:13 I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. Gen 9:14 And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: Gen 9:15 And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh.*

This covenant is with Abram and his seed, to give them a vast tract of land, bigger than Canaan, stretching from the Nile to the Euphrates and comprising everything between. It is a covenant with Christ and we are seeing that Christ was apparent to Abram and that they, Christ and Abram were in the same time frame, together as one.

*Gal 3:15 Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto. Gal 3:16 Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. Gal 3:17 And this I say, that **the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.***

What does the Apostle Paul say? He says that men make covenants just like God, and when they do it is a solemn abiding agreement. It is not unilaterally, by one party, cancelled and it is not unilaterally added to? Once the agreement is ratified and its tokens exchanged, both parties must abide by the covenant or..... what? If the covenant is broken unilaterally, the other party is no longer under an obligation to uphold it.

*Deu 31:18 And I will surely hide my face in that day for all the evils which they shall have wrought, in that they are turned unto other gods. Deu 31:19 Now therefore write ye this song for you, and teach it the children of Israel: put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the children of Israel. Deu 31:20 For when I shall have brought them into the land which I swore unto their fathers, that floweth with milk and honey; and they shall have eaten and filled themselves, and waxen fat; then will they turn unto other gods, and serve them, and provoke me, and **break my covenant.** Deu 31:21 And it shall come to pass, when many evils and troubles are befallen them, that this song shall testify against them as a witness; for it shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their seed: for I know their imagination which they go about, even now, before I have brought them into the land which I swear.*

The word “confirm” or ratify is used by Paul to show, in Galatians, that the covenant that God made was confirmed to Christ, *Gal 3:17 And I say this, A covenant having been **ratified before to Christ by God**, the Law coming into being four hundred and thirty years after, does not annul the promise, so as to abolish it.* LITV. This is a better translation.

What Abram did, he did with Christ. They ratified the covenant together, but the Law, the Law given at the hands of Moses, which was 430 years in the future, did not at remove the obligations of that promise, given before the Law was agreed. That promise given in a covenant with Abram is not superseded by the Law.

Paul continues: *Gal 3:18 For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise. Gal 3:19 Wherefore **then serveth the law?** It **was added because of transgressions**, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.*

There was the covenant with Abram and the covenant with Moses. Surely the covenant with Moses superseded it and was superior to it? No it was not. **“Wherefore then serveth the law?”** The Law **was not** given to Moses as a superior gesture over Abram. It was given for another reason. It was **“was added because of transgressions”**. Whose transgression? It was the sins of Israel. If there was a need for an additional agreement this was it. But more than that it served as an interim measure until the “seed” came.

The **covenant** was with Abram and the **promise** was strictly with Christ, *Gen 15:17 And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, **behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces.** Gen 15:18 In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates:* God alone, Christ and the Father, walked between the pieces of the sacrifice. **Abram did not walk between the sacrifice.**

I take this to be the manifestation of God, walking between the parts, shown to us as a *“a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp”*, just as He did on Sinai, *Exo 20:18 And all the people saw the thunders, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and **the mountain smoking**: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. Exo 20:19 And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.*

The Law was given to check lawlessness, and we learn that God the Father had the “seed” in mind **not Abram or the Jews**. *Rom 4:13 For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was **not** to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith, Rom 4:14 For **if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect**: Rom 4:15 Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression. Rom 4:16 Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all.*



Figure 19 Abram's kingdom

As Paul concludes, the law was a

“schoolmaster” to bring us to Christ, *Gal 3:22 But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. Gal 3:23 But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Gal 3:24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. Gal 3:25 But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. Gal 3:26 For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.*

So then, let me summarise. God came to Abram and made a covenant. It was a covenant with Christ. The Law which came 430 years later was added because of the transgression of the people. It did not supersede the Covenant with Abram. It was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. The great end of God’s plan was Christ and it started here in Abram’s time.

The Lord promised him the land “from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates”. Not the promised land of Canaan, the territory limited by the Jordan, what we would call the West Bank (of the Jordan) but a much, much bigger territory. The land which God promised extended from Egypt to the river of Babylon. This land features in a mysterious prophecy.

*Isa 19:22 And the LORD shall smite Egypt: he shall smite and heal it: and they shall return even to the LORD, and he shall be intreated of them, and shall heal them. Isa 19:23 In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. Isa 19:24 In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: Isa 19:25 Whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, **Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance.***

When the Israelites had finished their journeys in the Wilderness of Sinai and God had permitted them to enter the Promised Land, they entered a smaller part of the allotment than God originally gave. Why did they enter such a small part of the land? In our map, they took the land shown in red, but they were given the land shown in green. There is a big difference in the land area.

Was it a sign that the nation had fallen short and they only merited a smaller allotment? Nothing is said on that score. Joshua conquers the land of Canaan and that seems to be it, *Jos 23:4 Behold, I have divided unto you by lot these nations that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, even unto the great sea westward. Jos 23:5 And the LORD your God, he shall expel them from before you, and drive them from out of your sight; and ye shall possess their land, as the LORD your*

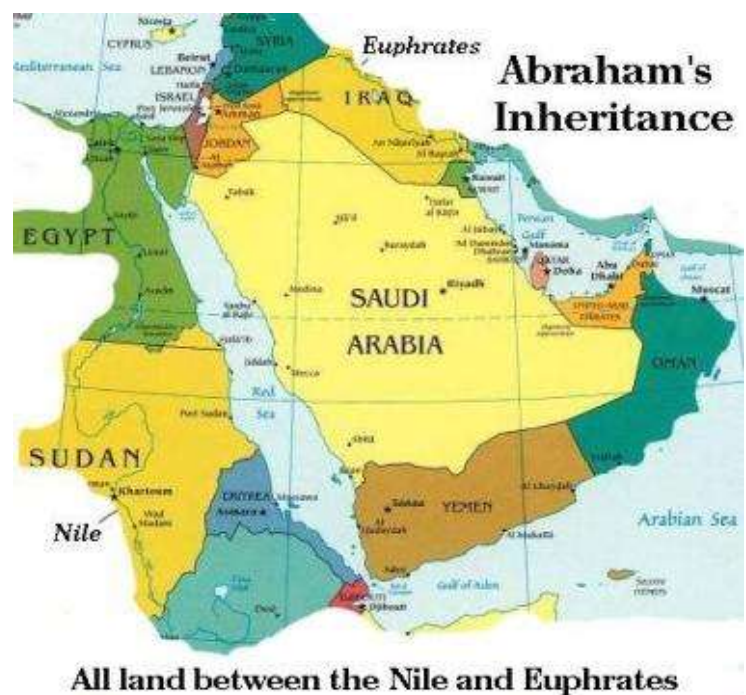


Figure 20 The land between the rivers

God hath promised unto you.

What of the other tract of land the land outside of Canaan but still promised to Abram? Considering that all of the land of Canaan was promised to Abram, **PLUS** the land from the river of Egypt to the great river Euphrates, a land that was far greater in extent than he would actually need, **he received none of it in his lifetime.** The promise must have some other meaning than a literal view allows. Abram's not receiving the land that he was promised is seen as proving the promise of his resurrection from the grave, *Act 7:5 And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child.*

Using our rule of interpreting scripture in its highest form as pertaining to Christ, we now see what is meant by the promise. But firstly there is a principle at work in Scripture, which Paul elucidates, *1Co 15:45 And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. 1Co 15:46 Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual.* It is this, that the earthly, that which is made of flesh, is made a reality before that which is of the spirit.

We are flesh but we shall become spirit, our body is exchanged for a spiritual counterpart, *1Co 15:44 It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. 1Co 15:45 And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.* The realm of the unseen, higher than this realm, the spirit realm, the unseen reality, *Eph 6:12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*

We translate this truth into Jesus ministry. Jesus lived within the bounds of the (lesser) earthly Promised Land. He never went out of Canaan except to go into Egypt as a child with His parents, *Mat 2:13 And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. Mat 2:14 When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: Mat 2:15 And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, **Out of Egypt have I called my son.***

The Scripture is taken from Hosea, *Hos 11:1 When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.* Jesus is by this identifying with the Nation of Israel, and so there is first the earthly and He takes upon Himself the earthly Nation. He then proceeds to minister within the Promised Land.

At the mount of Transfiguration, He told the disciples He would soon leave them, *Luk 9:28 And about eight days after these sayings, it happened: also taking Peter and John and James, He went into the mountain to pray. Luk 9:29 And in His praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing was dazzling white. Luk 9:30 And, behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah. Luk 9:31 Appearing in glory, they spoke of His **EXODUS**, which He was about to accomplish in*

Jerusalem. LITV. Jesus was about to leave them and from earthly Jerusalem He would begin the journey.

Where does He go? He departed to Heaven, *Act 1:10 And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Act 1:11 Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*

This is the spiritual Jerusalem to which Jesus ascends, *Gal 4:25 For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. Gal 4:26 But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.*

He showed without a doubt, where His Kingdom was, *Joh 18:35 Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done? Joh 18:36 Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.*

To return to Abram, He was given the promise of land a land much bigger than he needed. He would not get it during this life, teaching him to look to heaven for the promise. Jesus shows by His life that He had not intended for man to live on earth forever, and that He had prepared a heavenly kingdom for them. Abram was being shown this by the earthly. First the natural and then the spiritual.

The extensive lands Abram was shown were symbolic of heaven. There was the land promised to Isaac, the forerunner of the Jews. There was the land promised to Ishmael, forerunner of the gentiles, who God had promised to bless also, *Gen 16:8 And he said, Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go? And she said, I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai. Gen 16:9 And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands. Gen 16:10 And the angel of the LORD said unto her, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude.*

There is another point about the Promised Land, it was a land where the people **rested**, *Jos 1:13 Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, The LORD your God hath given you rest, and hath given you this land. Jos 1:14 Your wives, your little ones, and your cattle, shall remain in the land which Moses gave you on this side Jordan; but ye shall pass before your brethren armed, all the mighty men of valour, and help them; Jos 1:15 Until the LORD have given your brethren rest, as he hath given you, and they also have possessed the land which the LORD your God giveth them: then ye shall return unto the land of your possession, and enjoy it, which Moses the LORD'S servant gave you on this side Jordan toward the sunrising.*

Jesus gives us rest, but soul rest, *Mat 11:28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Mat 11:29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. Mat 11:30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.* This is a lesson from history. Do you believe Christ or don't you, *Heb 3:17 But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? Heb 3:18 And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? Heb 3:19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.*

24. Why pray?

Luk 11:1 And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. Luk 11:2 And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.

Prayer is not well understood. It was not understood by John's disciples and it was not understood by Jesus' disciples and so they asked for help. It is not understood well by us. We assume that a new believer will know how to pray and we do not teach them the rudiments of the subject. The presumption is that they instinctively know, but they do not. They have to be taught and there is an etiquette to prayer.

It is something that you would have expected to have been sorted out long before Jesus came, if it was of any importance. For thousands of years, men stumbled in speech before God, because they were not taught "how to pray". It is an important issue that seems to have been neglected for all those years.

So often there were the intercessors of the people, like Abraham, that I suppose men did not learn to pray and others undertook it for them? *Gen 20:7 Now therefore restore the man his wife; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live: and if thou restore her not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that are thine,* and Moses, *Num 21:7 Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people.*

There are of course, many things which we can pray about, but what of the answer to prayer? Isn't that the thing that we are really after? It appears we are to pray for a range of things but the way we get answers for each thing we pray for is not so clear. How do we get answers to prayer? Do we invent answers, and say the Lord said this in answer, an internal rationalisation made by us, to associate the prayer with an answer? We make certain circumstances fit the outcome and directly attribute it to the Lord.

I was reading the biography of Alice von Hildebrand, a devout Catholic, and she said something which caused me to stop and think. She had met a Jewish colleague in her faculty at Hunter University, and she said how nice it was to have conversations with a man who believed in God. The implication was obvious, that the Jew had the same God as her. But their concepts were in name only, in that word, "God". When a man talks about God, in his mind there are many words that describe just who that "God" is. Just because I use the word "God" does not mean I have the same ideas behind the use of that word as you do. When someone talks about "God" it is not necessarily the same "God" as you have in mind. We interpret the word "God" from our point of view, from our world view and this is no less true of word "prayer" and its response.

I think that where the answer to a prayer does not have the clear and obvious response that brooks no interpretation, we should keep quiet and not invoke God, far less giving the event a divine purpose, though it is all part of providence. It may be as you say it is, it may be not, are you willing to

say “thus saith the Lord”. If a man prays for another that he may be healed, and in response to that an instant healing is observed by all present, then it may be that you can say the Lord did it, but then you would have to await the wider outcome, *Rev 16:14 For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.*

When the Lord appeared to Abram, it was initially **not** a response to prayer, or even in the context of prayer, as far as scripture is concerned. The Lord came to Abram. We just do not know what level of communication he had if any, *Gen 12:1 Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: Gen 12:2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:* Here he not only gets direction but the blessing of an inheritance. **All without having voiced a prayer.**

It may be a case of: *Isa 65:23 They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them. Isa 65:24 And it shall come to pass, that **before they call, I will answer;** and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.* Perhaps this is a lesson for the young Christian, more than for the Christian of years, although it still applies. It is to spend more time listening than speaking.

Which leads to another question, “Why pray?” Is there any point in praying when God knows the end from the beginning? *Isa 46:10 **Declaring the end from the beginning,** and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:* That presumes of course that prayer is only about the events or things which occur. No, prayer is much more than that.

It is the means whereby the individual has his eyes open to the plans of the Lord. From not knowing the Lord, Abram is led by the Lord the point where a conversation takes place, (*Gen 12 v 1, Gen 12 v 7, Gen 13 v 14, to Gen 15 v 1*). *Gen 15:1 After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. Gen 15:2 And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? Gen 15:3 And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.*

Abram is gently introduced to his Lord, God does not overburden him, give him too many things to think about. He establishes a relationship, a friendship, *Jas 2:23 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the **Friend of God.***

This I think, is how a prayer life begins. It is the start of a friendship that commences a dialogue. It is not the genie in the bottle relationship, where you just rub the lamp every time you want something. It is finding out how you can please your Creator, and not asking things that are wrong, *Jas 4:2 Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Jas 4:3 Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.* It is very important to know what God wants. If you really want to know, you will give attendance to His Word. You will not want to contradict it.

But I find that however well intentioned my goals, I suffer with wandering off in the midst of talking to the Lord, which is more than rude. I find my thoughts thinking about something mundane and I have lost the thread of what I was talking about. Again when I listen intently to hear the voice of God, the same thing happens. Why is there so much noise going on in my head, distracting my mind?

We turn to one of the great men of prayer. Did he have any “secrets” about how to pray? This is taken from “What George Mueller Can Teach Us about Prayer”, by Donald S. Whitney

Through his orphanage in Bristol, Mueller cared for as many as two thousand orphans at a time, more than ten thousand in his lifetime. Yet he never made the needs of his ministries known to anyone except to God in prayer. Only through his annual reports did people learn after the fact, what the needs had been during the previous year and how God had provided.

Mueller had over fifty thousand specific recorded answers to prayers in his journals, thirty thousand of which he said were answered the same day or the same hour that he prayed them. Think of it: that’s five hundred definite answers to prayer each year, more than one per day, every single day for sixty years! God funnelled over 130 million pounds (in today’s pounds) through his hands, in answer to prayer.

How did George Mueller pray? He said that for the first ten years of what he called his “life of faith”, referring not to when he was unknown but to ten years of trust in God and remarkable answers to prayer, he often struggled to get into the spirit of prayer, in other words, to really feel like praying. Until, that is, he made one slight alteration in his method. Here’s how he described the change:

“The difference, then, between my former practice and my present one is this: formerly, when I rose, I began to pray as soon as possible, and generally spent all my time till breakfast in prayer, or almost all the time. At all events I almost invariably began with prayer. . . . But what was the result? I often spent a quarter of an hour, or half an hour, or even an hour on my knees before being conscious to myself of having derived comfort, encouragement, humbling of soul, etc.; and often, after having suffered much from wandering of mind for the first ten minutes, or quarter of an hour, or even half an hour, I only then really began to pray.

I scarcely ever suffer now in this way. For my heart being nourished by the truth, being brought into experimental [today we would say “experiential”] fellowship with God, I speak to my Father and to my Friend (vile though I am, and unworthy of it) about the things that He has brought before me in His precious Word. It often now astonishes me that I did not sooner see this point.”

So Mueller would sometimes flounder for half an hour to an hour trying to pray, fighting to focus his thoughts and to kindle feelings for prayer in his heart. Only after that long, determined struggle would he finally enter into a sense of communion with God.

But once he began the practice of conversing with God about what he found in the Word of God, he “scarcely ever” suffered with those problems in prayer again. Praying through a passage of Scripture as he went “walking about in the fields”, was the uncomplicated method that transformed the daily experience of one of the most famous men of prayer in history.

This worked for Mueller and it may work for you, but remember, you are an individual who has to get a personal relationship with God. Like Abram, God wants friends, not robots. Sure, He wants to see Christ in us, but each of us is distinctive. We physically differ from each other so surely our prayers do, without violating the image of God in us?

As well as reading scripture, as the start of a prayer time, write down your prayers, make a list, pray over it, and if it contains specific requests, note when they are fulfilled. It will certainly create a focus and avoid repetition. It will avoid just praying for the sake of praying. But that is only half of the prayer session. **What about when the Lord talks to you?**

I note this, that Abram speaks **second to God**. When we rush into the presence of God, when we turn to Him, breathless with our request and prayers, it is without an “excuse me”, a request to enter, or a “sorry, am I interrupting”, or even a thought who might be in the queue of prayer. Perhaps this is why the question comes after the answer is given, *Gen 15:1 After these things **the word of the LORD** came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. Gen 15:2 And **Abram said**, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me,*

It is a simple statement of intent from the Lord, and the question simply answered. It was not a long prayer, but it was precise conversation with a specific answer. We burble all around the houses and if we are honest we do not say much. We think we shall be “heard for our long prayers”. Perhaps we ought to spend some time in “pre-prayer”, that is settling what we are going to ask, meditating on whether it is a just request, and whether or not it is something we can do for ourselves?

How many things do we pray for that we can **do** ourselves and how many times do we say to others, “I will pray for you”, instead of “**what can I do for you?**” People pray for me that I will be healed of the effects of the stroke, which I have not asked for, but neglect to offer any help to me, which I occasionally want. My close family have done far more, they have been there for me. There are also a few exceptions, like the man who lives close to me, and sadly he is not a believer, but he has more of the fruits of human kindness in him than many Christians. Praying can salve the conscience, but in the main, like the Pharisee, they pray to themselves. You see, praying about something casts the responsibility on to God and absolves the petitioner of responsibility but doing something that involves your time and ingenuity. Perhaps this is why so many, “I’ll pray for you requests”, are just rejected.

The best lesson on “How to pray” was given by the Lord Himself. It first sets the scene in preparation for prayer, *Mat 6:5 And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. Mat 6:6 But thou, when thou prayest, **enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door**, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. Mat 6:7 But when ye pray, **use not vain repetitions, as the***

heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Mat 6:8 Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

“The model prayer” itself is a series of things to meditate on, consider, ask for legitimately, and repent of. Mat 6:9 After this manner therefore pray ye: **Our Father which art in heaven**, Hallowed be thy name. Mat 6:10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Mat 6:11 Give us this day our daily bread. Mat 6:12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. Mat 6:13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. Mat 6:14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: Mat 6:15 But **if ye forgive not men their trespasses**, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

People say it as a mantra but it is much more than that and you will find it gives you a good basis for going before God. Mat 6:9 Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Mat 6:10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. This leads to a worship of the Creator, the things He has made, the wonders of Creation, thoughts of heaven and praise for the abode of Eternity, what is Holiness, how Holy His name is and how I can uphold it in a world set on His destruction. This leads me to think of the Kingdom, its imminence, and that I should pray wholeheartedly for its coming, and that as a citizen of heaven how willing I am to leave this earth and be there, which is far better.

Mat 6:11 Give us this day our daily bread. Do we consider the wonder of providence, the faithfulness over the years, the seed time and harvest which shall remain as long as the earth, our selfishness at not giving thanks as often as we might, the intricacy of growth and maturity and the seed dying that it may become even more. Do we give thanks for the Bread of Life, that we can partake in it, that we are one with Him or do we take it all for granted?

Mat 6:12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. Mat 6:13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Do I give thanks continually that I am a sinner saved by grace or have I forgotten the miracle? Do I confess to God my sins regularly or am I just an ungrateful hypocrite, thanking God that I am not as other men? Do I live a life of repentance and try to see myself as God sees me? And have I forgotten that I live in a world of temptation, a minefield waiting to trip me and blow my Christian life apart? Only the Lord can save me as I battle principalities and powers. Except the Lord Builds the House: Psa 127:1 they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. Do I forgive as I am forgiven? No? Then unhappily there is no forgiveness for you.

All of this and much more is contained in that simple yet profound prayer, the Lord’s prayer. It is an aide memoire, a memory aid, a checklist, something to meditate on and reflect your Christian progress.

Of course, Abram did not have this prayer yet, but he was learning from the same Teacher, and as he learned he became the great man he was.

25. God calling

I want to take a look at “calling” and what it is and what it should mean to a Christian, *Heb 11:8 By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.*

I got into this study because of something I read concerning the Church of England and “lay readers”.

Readers are **lay people** in the Church of England who can come from any walk of life. They are called by God, go through theological training and at the end are licensed by the Bishop to preach, teach, lead worship and assist in many other areas of church life. There are over 10,000 men and women, in equal number, serving as Readers in the Church of England.

It was the bit where they said, “**They are called by God**, go through **theological training** and at the end are **licensed by the Bishop to preach**, teach, lead worship and assist in many other areas of church life.” I stopped short. What utter invention, what utter rubbish, what an invention of man. Firstly there is not such a thing as “lay person” in the Bible but we are all sinners for ALL have sinned. The equality of those in Christ was clear in the early Church, and the people, laos, laity, was the body people, but the laity were distinguished in time from the hierarchy that developed within the Church and the special powers they took upon themselves. But believers are all one in Christ, Royal priests, Kings, Saints without distinction of persons.

There is a distinction of gifts, *1Co 12:4 Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. 1Co 12:5 And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. 1Co 12:6 And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. 1Co 12:7 But the **manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.*** We are a divers body of people but it is the same Spirit that works in us and “*is given to every man to profit withal*”.

Now why was the Church of England saying these people, “readers” were called by God? Where in God’s Bible does God call a person to be a reader? I couldn’t find it. These people have to go through theological training, because God has not given them that knowledge and to cap it all, they have to be licensed by a Bishop, a bit like passing your driving test and getting your license. I began to question these things, going wider and deeper. **These people were being conditioned by another group of people to accept a non-Biblical position.** Just because a man who dresses up says, it does not make it true. A falsehood is still a falsehood.

Likewise a minister is **not made a minister by men. He is not given the title of a minister by men or made a minister by receiving a degree from a Bible college. It is by God alone.**

Your personality, way of thinking, the way you conduct yourself, etc., are all hardwired in to your calling. I then thought about the wider ministries and whether they would say they were “**called by God**”? For example, a man who says he receives a call to go into a particular denomination, Baptist, Church of England, Presbyterian, Methodist, has he received a calling from God, directing him to do that? Has God directed him to do something that He never did in the Bible, namely making a “calling” to these non-Biblical denominations? No, I do not think that is right. It could only be by an **extra non-Biblical** directive?

Now in case you think I am putting forward a false teaching you must judge my words, *2Pe 2:1 But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. 2Pe 2:2 And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.* Am I teaching a falsehood?

I am saying that any man who claims he is called to go into the ministry of a specific denomination, called to go into the Church of England, for example, is misled, is deceived. I do not believe any man is called to a denomination, period. Any man who says that he is, is misleading you, Anglicans, Methodist, Baptist are not called to those denominations because Christ never set up denominations but he did set up the body of believers who are encouraged to the unity of the faith.

I remind you that denomination means division. If there were no difference between the various classes of Christians, if there was no difference between, say, Baptists and Anglicans, then why adopt different names? Obviously they are divided.

In 428 A.D. Pope Celestine 1st was not amused. Honoratus, an influential monk, had just become Bishop of Aries. News was arriving in Rome that Honoratus, to the Pope's 'astonishment', had as bishop, been wearing clothing that differentiated him from laypeople. This, Celestine declared, was contrary to tradition. Not only was it a 'novelty'; it was also a 'superfluous superstition'. It was right that the clergy be distinguished from 'the common folk', as well as from non-Christian people. But let this be 'by our learning, not by our garments; by our mode of life, **not by what we wear**; by purity of thought, not by peculiarities of dress.'

Here again people in positions of leadership make a non-Biblical distinction, between them and us, by dressing differently, by wearing "dog collars", wearing crosses and dressing sometimes elaborately different. Why? Because if they had the power and presence of the Lord it would be sufficient. Why do these men look for every reason to be non-Biblical and not to be in the mode of Jesus? *Luk 6:46 And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*

It disappoints me that my brothers in Africa follow this white man's tradition and put the yoke of a white collar on, dress in white man's religious garb, in the name of a religion, which Jesus never asked them to do. Why do people copy white men, thinking that it gives them credibility? It may be credibility with men but Jesus said, follow Him. Do they succumb to peer pressure?

A few years ago I read an article by a "rev" so and so, stating, in an anti-catholic rhetoric, that the Pope and the papacy were un-Biblical. I wrote to challenge him that neither was the term "reverend" used of a teacher in the church, it was an obvious case of pots and kettles. He wrote back to me, unashamed, that the term "rev" gave him credibility in the community. Well, tell that to the victims of all the "reverends" and "monsignors" and "fathers", who abused their position in the church! Because if you have to stick a label in front of your name to be credible, you should ask why you do not have credibility without it? I shall return to the "calling" to minister later, but I want to look at the Christian calling first.

Taking then a closer look at "calling" or "vocation", *Eph 4:1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation (calling) wherewith ye are called, Eph 4:2 With all*

lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Eph 4:3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Eph 4:4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; Eph 4:5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism.

Jesus is concerned for ALL believers that they follow Him in truth, Mar 7:14 *And when he had called all the people unto him, he said unto them, Hearken unto me every one of you, and understand:* Mar 7:15 *There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man.* Mar 7:16 *If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.*

But before you have that “ear to hear” you must be invited into fellowship with Him, 1Co 1:9 *God is faithful, by whom ye were **called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.*** It is apparent that the life we live must be a clean life, 1Th 4:7 *For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.....* 2Ti 1:9 *Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.*

There are many who enter the church not knowing this fellowship, and yet they claim a calling in the name of God, but have no knowledge of Him as a personal Saviour, 1Pe 2:21 *For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:* 1Pe 2:22 *Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:* 1Pe 2:23 *Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:* 1Pe 2:24 ***Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.***

God calls us to His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, first and foremost. There is no way around that. If you are not called to be saved you have no part in the church. It is part of the Great Commission, Mar 16:15 *And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.* Mar 16:16 *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.* You cannot preach what you do not know for yourself or it makes you a hypocrite, an actor.

God calls us to be sanctified, or holy, 1Pe 1:2 *Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.* This will produce fruit, Mar 4:2 *And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his doctrine,* Mar 4:3 *Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow:* Mar 4:4 *And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up.* The seed is the word of God planted in the heart.

The Christian is fruitful, Joh 15:1 *I am the True Vine, and My Father is the Vinedresser.* Joh 15:2 *Every branch in Me not bearing fruit, He takes it away; and each one bearing fruit, He prunes, so that it may bear more fruit.* Joh 15:3 *You are already pruned because of the Word which I have spoken to you.*

The variety of spiritual fruit is given in Galatians, Gal 5:22 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,* Gal 5:23 *Meekness, temperance: against such there is no*

law. Gal 5:24 And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. Gal 5:25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Abram was not excused this and neither is any Christian. Before we rush off and do things for God, before we say, "I am called to do this", we should explore what is our true calling, and it is this: *Php 3:14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the **high calling of God in Christ Jesus**.....Heb 3:1 Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of **the heavenly calling**.* Nothing is more important than this calling, that we are called first and foremost called to Jesus Christ, to the obedience of faith. It is because men fail to obtain this that they enter into all manner of "callings" which are products of imagination or desire.

Our Lord was up against men who had imagined religion, who had invented it in their hearts, and it upset them when a genuine servant of God came along, *Mar 6:2 And when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands? Mar 6:3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him. Mar 6:4 But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house. Mar 6:5 And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them.*

You see, men were not bothered about **what** was taught but **where it came from**. It was not taught by a Rabbi but it was taught by a carpenter, which in their minds was a "scandal", an offence. It was impudence of the highest order, that a man, supposedly lacking learning should dare to pronounce on matters religious. The Apostles too had no qualifications from men, but they had them from Christ, *Act 4:13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, **that they had been with Jesus**. Act 4:14 And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.*

That is the important qualifier for us all, "**that they had been with Jesus**", that they had pursued the high calling of Christ and nothing else mattered. Jesus called the disciples to follow Him. He did not give them titles like bishop, or pope, He did not get them to dress differently to the people so that they stood out. They addressed each other as friends. This was an ordinary band of men with an exceptional teacher. Abraham had this calling to and he pursued it doggedly. He followed every word given him, not turning to the left or to the right to avoid his duty, even when it came to sacrificing his son.

Would we could say it in the church today? It is a rainbow church, a church of liquorice allsorts, a patchwork of beliefs, where everyone does that which is right in his own eyes. Every man worships his own god, *Isa 48:4 Because I knew that thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass; Isa 48:5 I have even from the beginning declared it to thee; before it came to pass I shewed it thee: lest thou shouldest say, Mine idol hath done them, and my graven image, and my molten image, hath commanded them.*

In Samuel, there is a name given to this practice, *1Sa 15:22 And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. 1Sa 15:23 For **rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft**, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king.*

Saul lost the crown because of his witchcraft. It dogged him to his last day on earth when all he could do was consult a witch at Endor. You will tell me I am being hard and disingenuous on those men who follow others into disobedience and call them witches, when they would call themselves pillars of the church. But that is what they are.

I said that I would say a few words about calling to the ministry.

Paul states his calling at the start of his letters, *1Co 1:1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother.* Have you heard people who say that Jesus appeared to them to give them their calling? That is not most of us. Others say that they heard an audible voice about their calling, and that is not most of us either.

“Many of us have either an inner voice or conviction that pushes us to love, serve and seek God. Some may receive a prophetic word or prophetic confirmation, others may have a dream, or often God brings that conviction through the reading of the Bible. It is as if a verse related to the calling jumps out of the page.

Every calling to minister was predestined by God before the person was born. So when you were born, God “hardwired” you with certain characteristics that go with the calling. They are inseparable from you as a person.”

I do not think that these people have a **greater desire for God and the things of God than the average Christian**. Ministers of the Gospel are part of the body, but this is not the only gift and I think that all Christians have a gift.

But before they or any one embark on their calling, they should surely know Who called them and His method of working and what He requires of them before rushing into a ministry.

26. Abram’s Church

What was Abram’s Church? Let us look at the Church from Abram’s perspective, uncluttered by history, free from all the sects, splinter groups and schisms that have blighted the religious landscape. The Church existed in the Old Testament, and for those who want proof: *Act 7:37 This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear. Act 7:38 This is he, that was in **the church in the wilderness** with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us:*

The word ekklesia, or Church is used regularly in the Old Testament Greek, translating קָהָל = qâhal, “assembly” or “gathering” in Hebrew, into ekklesia. A Church is the gathering together of God’s people. I have dealt with this subject in detail here: p.6ff, Jesus and His Church

<https://archive.org/details/JESUSANDHISCHURCH/page/n5/mode/2up>

Have you ever wondered, if we had followed the pattern of Abram’s Church, what it would look like? Whether we would have been left with monumental buildings, church hierarchy, dogmatic rules and regulations? Or would we have been left with a simple religion? *Jas 1:26 If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Jas 1:27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*

The legacy of following tradition, instead of finding out the truth for oneself leads to compromise and error. Isaac digged his own wells. If each generation had to prove what it supposedly believed, they would have to do some work instead of complacently sitting on the Tel of their ancestors, each generation building on the rubbish tips of the past. Surely, it was not just the king who wrote himself a copy of the law? *Deu 17:18 And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: Deu 17:19 And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them: Deu 17:20 That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel.*

If all learned to write, and all lived by it, what a powerful people we would become. Instead we are dragged around like blind leading blind.

A Church is a relationship with a person, Christ, *Col 1:24 Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church:* Because of that relationship, we have a relationship with every blood bought child of God. The primary relationship is essential. If there is no relationship with Christ there is no relationship with His children. You can call yourself whatever you like, you can call yourself the Church of God, but if you have people who attend and do not know Christ, they are not part of the Church of Christ.

The relationship between Christ and His church is likened to the relationship between Abraham and Sara, *1Pe 3:5 For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: 1Pe 3:6 Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement. 1Pe 3:7 Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.*

Peter is backed up by Paul. *Eph 5:30 For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. Eph 5:31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. Eph 5:32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ*

and the church. *Eph 5:33 Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.*

So we establish the Church in human relationships as far back as Abram. It is the relationship between husband and wife, an intimate family relationship, a caring relationship, disciplined but not cruel. But with time it became just like that, cruel. What is more, if it were not enough that satan persecuted the Church, so called “Christians” persecuted it also. I could cite many examples of this persecution but let this stand for now. It is taken from an article by Paul Penley.

John Calvin’s interpretation of the Bible justified the murder of his theological opponents. He himself did not cut off any heads or light any fires that burned human heretics alive, but John Calvin’s preaching from the Old and New Testaments claimed those capital punishments aligned with God’s interests.

How so? Calvin did not believe all Old Covenant laws had been set aside by the New Covenant Jesus inaugurated. He didn’t buy into the plain sense of Hebrews: “God has made the first covenant obsolete” (Hebrews 8:13). He manoeuvred around Paul’s conclusion: “the Law became a tutor to lead us to Christ and now that faith has come we are no longer under a tutor” (Galatians 3:24-25; cf. Rom 10:4). Calvin dismissed this data from the New Testament and decided the moral laws in the Old Covenant laws of the Torah still applied. And killing people who perverted his pure doctrine was a moral necessity.

Calvin specifically justified capital punishment of heretics with *Leviticus 24:16*. *“The one who blasphemes the name of the Lord should be put to death; all the congregation must stone him. Any foreigner or native who blasphemes the Name should be put to death.”*

Jesus’ teaching to “love your enemies” didn’t stop Calvin from approving and promoting the death of his theological enemies. And Paul’s instructions for dealing with people who theologically disagree with you were equally ignored: *“A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone, be able to teach, and be patient with difficult people. Gently instruct those who oppose the truth. Perhaps God will change those people’s hearts, and they will learn the truth”* (2 Timothy 2:24-25). Calvin did not patiently discuss his differences with people who promoted competing ideas. Calvin requested beheadings, made death threats, and praised God for orchestrating the torture of heretics.

Calvin spelled out his theologically reinforced vengeance in a personal letter: “I am persuaded that it is not without the special will of God that, apart from any verdict of the judges, the criminals have endured protracted torment at the hands of the executioner.” - Calvin’s letter to Farel on 24th July (for more words directly from Calvin’s pen, read *Selected Works of John Calvin*). Calvin believed God made sure criminals didn’t die quickly when tortured. This vengeful attitude and his support for outdated Old Covenant laws that legislated capital punishment for competing theologians that challenged his preferred doctrines, look more like ISIS than Jesus.

Personal correspondence and city council records betray John Calvin's extraordinary influence in Geneva. Although he was asked to leave in 1538 when he enforced his strict moral standards and pushed for the church's independent power to excommunicate people, Genevan officials invited him to return in 1541 to resolve church divisions. Upon his return, the city council approved his Ecclesiastical Ordinances that included the establishment of the Consistory. The Consistory, a church court that oversaw the discipline of the citizens of Geneva, met every Thursday to review cases (This book is a chronicle of the Consistory's records from 1542-1544.) John Calvin led the court. Although the Consistory did not have the power to imprison, exile, or kill those who were guilty, Calvin could still convince the city magistrates to wield such power when his theological opponents contradicted him.

When Jacques Gruet, a theologian with differing views, placed a letter in Calvin's pulpit calling him a hypocrite, he was arrested, tortured for a month and beheaded on July 26, 1547. Gruet's own theological book was later found and burned along with his house, while his wife was thrown out into the street to watch.

Michael Servetus, a Spaniard, physician, scientist and Bible scholar, suffered a worse fate. He was Calvin's longtime acquaintance who resisted the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. However, he angered Calvin by returning a copy of Calvin's Institutes with critical comments in the margins. So what did Calvin do? You can read his resolution from a personal letter he wrote to a friend:

"Servetus offers to come hither, if it be agreeable to me. But I am unwilling to pledge my word for his safety, for if he shall come, I shall never permit him to depart alive, provided my authority be of any avail." - Letter to Farel, 13th February 1546.

The next time Servetus attended Calvin's Sunday preaching service on a visit, Calvin had him arrested and charged with heresy. The 38 official charges included rejection of the Trinity and infant baptism. The city magistrates condemned him to death. Calvin pleaded for Servetus to be beheaded instead of the more brutal method of burning at the stake, but to no avail. Some people see Calvin's compassion in pursuing a more humane method of death, but ultimately he supported killing Servetus and all such heretics.

On October 27th 1553, green wood was used for the fire so Servetus would be slowly baked alive from the feet upward. For 30 minutes he screamed for mercy and prayed to Jesus as the fire worked its way up his body to burn the theology book strapped to his chest as a symbol of his heresy. Calvin summarized the execution this way:

"Servetus . . . suffered the penalty due to his heresies, but was it by my will? Certainly his arrogance destroyed him not less than his impiety. And what crime was it of mine if our Council, at my exhortation, indeed, but in conformity with the opinion of several Churches, took vengeance on his execrable blasphemies?" - Calvin

How could such torture be condoned? In November 1552 the Geneva Council declared Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion to be a "holy doctrine which no man might speak against." Disagreeing with Calvin's view of God was a violation warranting the death penalty according to the way John Calvin interpreted Leviticus 24:16. The Geneva city council records describe one verdict where a man who publicly protested against John Calvin's doctrine of predestination was flogged at all the city's main intersections and then expelled ("The Minutes Book of the Geneva City Council, 1541-59," translated by Stefan Zweig, Erasmus: The Right to Heresy). You did not get to disagree with Calvin in this town.

Well tell me, is it of Christ or is it not? Did Jesus say inflict suffering on a brother, kill him if he disagrees or use the civil magistrate to get someone to conform to the faith? How dare you go in front of an unbeliever with a child of God (*1Co 6:1 Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?*). Calvin's view of the law was very similar to R J Rushdooney's and the modern Christian reconstruction movement that advocates the death penalty as a tool of the Church.

How did we come to this? The Bible tells us and we neglect to hear it, *1Co 3:3 For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? 1Co 3:4 For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? 1Co 3:5 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? 1Co 3:6 I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. 1Co 3:7 So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.*

The taking sides, factions, making gods out of mortal men is contrary to the teaching of the One who has saved us. Is not the Father capable of looking after Himself without puny man defending Him? *Luk 6:27 But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Luk 6:28 Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. Luk 6:29 And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also. Luk 6:30 Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. Luk 6:31 And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.*

Read the books from the past, yes, but read with discernment, and never ever follow a man, but follow Christ, *Mat 23:2 Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: Mat 23:3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.*

Abram clearly was shown moral principles and was called to live by them, *1Pe 3:6 Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement. 1Pe 3:7 Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.* That was his uncluttered religion. He taught by his life.

Now what of so called ordination? Eph 4:11 **And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;** Eph 4:12 *For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Who is "HE"? It is Christ. Eph 4:10 He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.* So these "gifts" to the Church come from Christ and if the man does not know Christ, they are not gifts of Christ.

There is an order in the Churches, first, second, third, but it is not rank, 1Co 12:27 *Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. 1Co 12:28 And God hath set some in the church, **first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.** 1Co 12:29 Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? 1Co 12:30 Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?*

But they are not the only gifts, 1Co 12:6 *And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. 1Co 12:7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. 1Co 12:8 For to one is given by the Spirit **the word of wisdom;** to another **the word of knowledge** by the same Spirit; 1Co 12:9 To another **faith** by the same Spirit; to another **the gifts of healing** by the same Spirit; 1Co 12:10 To another **the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:** And note, there is not one man made college degree among them, only Jesus gifts.*

And there is more! Rom 12:5 *So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Rom 12:6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether **prophecy**, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Rom 12:7 **Or ministry**, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on **teaching**; Rom 12:8 Or he that exhorteth, on **exhortation**: he **that giveth**, let him do it with simplicity; he that **ruleth**, with diligence; he **that sheweth mercy**, with cheerfulness.*

Edification is the goal, 1Co 14:12 *Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the **edifying** of the church.*

Did you see anyone ordaining them before they could minister their gift? I did not. Did they have to dress up in special clothes to minister? No. Did they have to become a member of a Denomination before they were allowed to minister? No. Did they need man's authority to minister? No. All that they needed was Christ, solus Christus as the reformation said, Christ alone.

Why does He give these gifts? Because it's the way He wants to build His Church and the way He wants to see it operating. It is no good calling them something else, like readers or fathers, for example. They are not gifts, what He gave. If we want to see the building go up according to His plan, we must see that the people are exactly what He gave. If not then it is clearly something else.

If you receive a call to minister and it does not fit in with the New Testament pattern then it is not Christ's ministry and not of His calling. You need to look at your Bible translation as well, because it might be leading you to a wrong understanding. For example: 1Ti 3:1 *This is a true saying, If a man*

*desire the office of a **bishop**, he desireth a good work.* It doesn't say bishop, it says episcopo, or oversight.

And the idea that you need to set up a permanent legacy in the form of a denomination? You can forget that, *Act 13:36 For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption:* You only have NOW. We make errors and they are compounded as they go on in time and they do not get better. It's up to Christ the eternal King, builder of His Church to raise the future how He wants it. Let the errors die with us. Isaac must dig again the wells of his father, *Gen 26:18 And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham: and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them.*

Abram had the gift of Faith and he exercised it throughout his life. He left behind him nothing. Just a grave at Hebron. No cult, no religious group, no denomination. Why? He followed Christ. He was led out of Ur and followed his good Shepherd.

27. A very important matter

Matters that concern us today did not concern people of Abram's day and vice versa. We have plenty of food in the west and we do not have to worry about where it comes from, how it is farmed and how it gets to us. We do not treat illness in the same way and there are plenty of off the shelf remedies to keep us going. For the more serious illnesses, there are doctors and consultants to give us hope of recovery. In fact we seldom look to God and give Him thanks for these blessings, forgetting that He is still in control.

Our lives go on with so much leisure time, that it has spawned countless industries to absorb our time and our money. There are "nail bars", hairdressers, coffee shops, gymnasiums, restaurants, cinema, social venues, holidays abroad, home improvements, garden centres, cosmetic surgery, etc and we are obsessed with celebrity, living other people's lives by proxy. We have gained so much domestic technology over the past 100 years, that we cannot imagine our lives without it. We have cellular 'phones, television with its host of channels, double glazing, central heating, refrigerators, microwave ovens, fan ovens, food mixers, coffee makers, internet, exercise bikes and machines, etc.

They are not all bad and I am not going to go against all scientific advances, but I will question their value spiritually, especially where they take you away from the Lord and give satan an entry. Where they distract and eat up time that should be spent with God, by spending it on trivia. It is a truism that we have more time than ever, yet less time.

We should weep and mourn, not knowing what to do if these things were taken from us, if they did not exist anymore. Come to think of it they will be taken from us, and taken rapidly, *Rev 18:10 Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come. Rev 18:11 And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more: Rev 18:12 The merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most*

precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, Rev 18:13 And cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men. Rev 18:14 And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all. Rev 18:15 The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing,

We have brought in some new religious concerns along with the modern artefacts, a new Gospel to suit a new age. There is the prosperity Gospel to uphold our way of life and make it even better and more successful, because God wants us to prosper (sic!). We pray for all manner of things, from the welfare of our cats to the healing of all our diseases, forgetting that death is inevitable. It is all about me! Suffering and deprivation are not conducive to our so called Christianity. This artificial bubble called “God”, protects us from all harm. How far all of this is from the New Testament, *Php 1:28 And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God. Php 1:29 For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to **suffer for his sake**;*

How different are our concerns for this world that we have, than that of the great patriarch. Abram had no access to these so called conveniences and would have been surprised by them, so what did he do with his time? What occupied him? It strikes me that he lived life very much like those Anabaptists, the Hutterites, Mennonites and Amish, in a farming community marked by hard work and separation from the world.

Here is a bit about Abram’s world from Theology of Work Project:

Pastoral nomads cared for sheep and goats to obtain milk and meat (Gen. 18:7-8; 27:9; 31:38), wool, and other goods made from animal products such as leather. Donkeys carried loads (Gen. 42:26), and camels were especially suited for long-range travel (Gen. 24:10, 64; 31:17). The skills required to maintain these herds would have involved grazing and watering, birthing, treating the sick and injured, protecting animals from predators and thieves, as well as locating strays.

Fluctuations in weather and the size of growth in the population of the flocks and herds would have affected the economy of the region. Weaker groups of shepherds could easily become displaced or assimilated at the expense of those who needed more territory for their expanding holdings. Profit from shepherding was not stored as accumulated savings or investments on behalf of the owners and managers, but shared throughout the family. By the same token, the effects of hardship due to famine conditions would have been felt by all. While individuals certainly had their own responsibilities and were accountable for their actions, the communal nature of the family business generally stands apart from our contemporary culture of personal achievement and the expectation to show ever-increasing profits. Social responsibility would have been a daily concern, not an option.

In this way of life, shared values were essential for survival. Mutual dependence among the members of a family or tribe and awareness of their common ancestry would have

resulted in great solidarity, as well as vengeful hostility toward anyone who would disrupt it (Gen. 34:25-31). Leaders had to know how to tap the wisdom of the group in order to make sound decisions about where to travel, how long to stay, and how to divide the herds. They must have had ways of communicating with shepherds who took the flocks away at some distance (Gen. 37:12-14). Conflict-resolution skills were necessary to settle inevitable disputes over grazing land and water rights to wells and springs (Gen. 26:19-22). The high mobility of life in the country and one's vulnerability to marauders made hospitality much more than a courtesy. It was generally considered a requirement of decent people to offer refreshment, food, and lodging.

The patriarchal narratives repeatedly mention the great wealth of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen. 13:2; 26:13; 31:1). Shepherding and animal husbandry were honourable fields of work and could be lucrative, and Abraham's family became very wealthy. For example, to soften the attitude of his offended brother Esau prior to their meeting after a long time, Jacob was able to select from his property a gift of at least 550 animals: 200 female goats with 20 males, 200 ewes with 20 rams, 30 female camels with their calves, 40 cows with 10 bulls, and 20 female donkeys with 10 males (Gen. 32:13-15). It is therefore fitting that at the end of his life when Jacob conferred blessings on his sons, he testified that the God of his fathers had been "my shepherd all my life to this day" (Gen. 48:15). Although many passages in the Bible warn that wealth is often inimical to faithfulness (e.g., Jer. 17:11, Hab. 2:5, Matt. 6:24), Abraham's experience shows that God's faithfulness can be expressed in prosperity as well. As we shall see, this is by no means a promise that God's people should expect prosperity on a continuous basis.

The Bible only hints at the day to day life, but there was a major issue that continued to affect Sarai, *Gen 16:1 Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar. Gen 16:2 And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the LORD hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai. Gen 16:3 And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife.*

It must have been a thought which occupied her in the midst of daily chores, and this had gone on for years, all most too many to remember, *Gen 11:30 But Sarai was barren; she had no child.* Her husband of course had been getting many messages from God, visions to which she was only privy to after the event, when Abram told her, or did he? Did she share his confidence? Not really, *Gen 18:12 Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?* It is also clear that Abram was wavering in his confidence, *Gen 17:17 Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?*

I can understand that cynical laughter. Do you remember the spiritual experiences of ten, twenty or thirty years ago, how they become dim, and they lack the brightness of their giving? That might have happened to Abram. God did not keep appearing to him, and Abram must have been tempted to

question his sanity and belief. What, he might think, if those visions were of my making? Did those things really occur? Did I interpret them correctly?

Now we know how the story went because we see what God had in store for them. We are reading the story with hindsight and in doing so we realise that God is going to bring about miraculous birth, but **Abram and Sarai did not know yet**. The Lord had told them **what** He would do, *Gen 12:7 And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him..... Gen 13:15 For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. Gen 13:16 And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered..... Gen 15:13 And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; Gen 15:14 And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance.*

The Lord had said “WHAT” but not “HOW” He would do it. The Lord had not mentioned if Sarai was involved in the birth, or how the “seed” would be born, and as they grew older it became an increasing matter of anguish to them. They must have felt great responsibility and this was a time critical event.

Sarai wanted to give her husband a son and she knew it was for her, not possible now anyway. Her time was long past. And I do not think that Abram assuaged her concern, and sometimes he must have given her the feeling that it was all her fault and in desperation she comes up with a plan to somewhat fulfil her desires and a plan to which Abram signs up to, after all they had been in the promised land 10 years, *Gen 16:3 And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan.* They did not yet realise the Lord’s time.

Sarai is not alone in scripture as several women in the Bible could not give birth (childless) but were healed by God. There are at least seven women in the Bible who were initially childless (also referred to as barren). Six of these seven finally did have children after several years. In Old Testament times it was a shame for a wife not to bear children (be childless) for her husband. Although many times it was the female in the marriage who was physically incapable of bearing children, there were no doubt instances where it was the male who could not engender offspring. The other women who were childless were, Rebekah, Rachel, the wife of Manoah, Hannah, Michal who remained childless, and Elizabeth.

But Sarai had jumped the gun, Abram too. The pair of them had left God out of the equation. Princess Diana, once famously said, “Well, there were three of us in this marriage, so it was a bit crowded.” How wonderful for her that would have been, if the third person had been the Lord. Sarai could have said there were two people in her marriage, because she had left God out and so had her husband.

What was it that had left Sarai, or Abram, in this state of being unable to conceive? The history of disease is obscure but we know that God invokes illness as part of His Judgements, *Gen 12:17 And the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram's wife. Gen 12:18 And Pharaoh called Abram, and said, What is this that thou hast done unto me? why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife?*

Childlessness was a curse of the law. The summary of the benefits and curses of the Law as given to Moses by God and shows that if the nation were to be obedient there would not be any childless couples, or even animals, among the people. It also shows that God himself is capable of either shutting up the wombs of women or opening them as he wishes, *Exo 23:25 And ye shall serve the LORD your God, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee. Exo 23:26 There shall nothing cast their young, nor be barren, in thy land: the number of thy days I will fulfil. Exo 23:27 I will send my fear before thee, and will destroy all the people to whom thou shalt come, and I will make all thine enemies turn their backs unto thee..... Deu 7:13 And he will love thee, and bless thee, and multiply thee: he will also bless the fruit of thy womb, and the fruit of thy land, thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep, in the land which he swore unto thy fathers to give thee. Deu 7:14 Thou shalt be blessed above all people: there shall not be male or female barren among you, or among your cattle. Deu 7:15 And the LORD will take away from thee all sickness, and will put none of the evil diseases of Egypt, which thou knowest, upon thee; but will lay them upon all them that hate thee.*

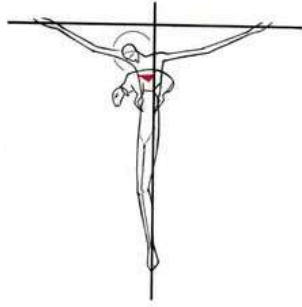
So it could have been a secret sin that left Sarai barren, but then she was no different to others for all have sinned. I think it was more than that because, lest we forget, Adam and Eve were cursed and that curse outworked, *Gen 3:16 Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.* Abram and Sarai are cursed and there is no escaping the fact, but so are the rest of mankind.

We solve the issue by turning our attention to Jesus. In the book of Matthew, it starts with these words: *Mat 1:1 The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Mat 1:2 Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren;*

By switching Sarai's womb on, by switching the incubator to go, the start of the generation of Jesus Christ can begin. It begins at a time when all earthly hope had passed, as far as the old couple were concerned and thereby shows the power of God alone in the event. The miracle of Isaac's birth is a foretaste of the greater miracle of Christ's birth. God is plainly in control in the bringing each event to pass, securing Christ at the right time in History despite man. Sarai giving birth brings together the Divine and the human in the birth.

Notice this, that the sacrifice of Christ, symbolised by the animals, preceded the miraculous birth of Isaac. Abram was shown the death of the Christ before he was shown the birth of Isaac. *Eph 1:4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: 1Pe 1:20 Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.*

The absolute certainty of the birth of Christ is laid before us, which should also give us assurance of the final consummation.



28. The tangled web

Gen 16:3 And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife. Gen 16:4 And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived: and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes.

This has been an irritation in Abram's house for at least 10 years. It has been festering like a sore ever since Abram started talking about a God who appeared to him and was directing his life. Only Abram had received the words of God and for all anybody knew he could be hallucinating or suffering from some form of dementia. We saw that God had given no directions as to how Abram was to get the seed, although he had promised the land, and that it might not be Sarai who would have the child. In fact, as time went on, it was less likely that it was Sarai who would have the child, and their eyes began to turn towards the younger Egyptian girl, who had become part of their house.

Spurgeon says,

"Very likely Hagar was one of the slaves given to him by Pharaoh when he dismissed him and Sarah; and you know what trouble Hagar brought into the family. If Abraham had lived the separated life, and had not fallen into the customs of those round about him, he would not have had that sin and sorrow concerning Hagar; nor would he have had that righteous rebuke from Abimelech, the king of Gerar, when again he had acted deceitfully with regard to his wife."

I do not think this is very helpful exegesis. It is all very well pontificating on a Sunday morning, people sitting in pews, all being good Christians, hiding their own transgressions, and dissecting the character of a poor old man, Abram, who is truly concerned about God's word. We judge Abram against, as yet, unwritten laws, and we sit white as snow, but secretly as whitened sepulchres.

It is like those people who took unmarried mothers children away from them, in their pious "holier than thou" attitude, saying they were sinners for having children out of wedlock but failing to see their own sins, *Gal 6:1 Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Gal 6:2 Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.*

Again, it is with the benefit of hindsight and the full revelation of the Gospel that Spurgeon does this. Abram's apparent deceit might well have been due to his ignorance of the circumstances. To say

that he acted out of a sinful motive is to paint a dark picture of one who is called “a righteous” man and a friend of God. I am inclined to look for different interpretations.

Ginsberg quotes a Jewish tradition,

“saying that before they came to live in the Promised Land, Abram and Sarai regarded their childlessness as punishment for not living in the land. But now they were in the land for ten years, and they still had no children. Sarai probably felt it was time to do something. Perhaps she thought along the lines of an old (unBiblical) proverb, “God helps those who help themselves.”

Well, God help those that do, for it just makes a mess and a tangled web. Yet I think this is what Sarai thought. In their tent, under the cold evenings by the fire, they had all talked about this. And let us not get prissy, they did what they could, physically to bring it to pass. Yes the “S” word, SEX, is not something “good” Christians talk about in church, it is not the topic for a sermon, but they continue to have it none the less, and it happens in the home and for most in the dark.

My parents never spoke of the subject. By the time I was about six years old and I was self-aware, I had framed the question and just needed the opportunity to ask my parents. I was here, how did it happen that I got here? I can remember my mum and dad sitting down after Saturday lunch, when I launched the epistemological question, “Where do babies come from?” I remember the reaction, when their boy wonder launched the question. They were totally unprepared for this, and although I cannot remember the conversation, I remember my mother laughing nervously and quickly passing the conversation to George, my father, who hadn’t seen it coming. I think I was told, embarrassedly, to wait until I was older. About 10 years later, as it happened.

Then there was also the case of what happened when my numerous aunts began to swell up. “She is having a baby”, all the adults would whisper, in case she found out, because she was no doubt ignorant of the fact. It was like someone who was waiting for the worst, it was like a terrible disease or a plague, which no one knew the cause of. It just happened to them, and they became pregnant. Seen through a child’s eyes it was mysterious and miraculous and something to behold but not to question. I have since learned that it is a topic that can be talked about without embarrassed sniggers.

The Moravian Christians were more enlightened. Zinzendorf thought about sexuality in new ways. Although there was nothing that today’s Christians would find immoral about their teachings, Moravians taught married couples to glory in marital sex, but at the same to regulate the practice and passion of it. Sex between husbands and wives was essentially a sacrament (a physical representation of spiritual union between Christ and Christians), which meant that they elevated its value far above what was typical for the time. They also fostered a culture of openness among married members. Sex was a topic of pastoral discussion, counselling sessions, and prayerful reflection. Because Moravians strictly forbid any sexual activity before marriage, older married couples assisted, mentored, and gave advice to newlyweds. So Moravians were quite ahead of their time.

Abram clearly loved Sarai and there must have been a great physical attraction as she was very beautiful, *Gen 12:11 And it happened when he had drawn near to come to Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, Behold, please, I know that you are a beautiful woman to look upon. Gen 12:12 And it will be, when the Egyptians see you, then they will say, This is his wife, and they will kill me, and they will save you alive.* LITV. That was his impression when she was 65 years old. She must have been someone to behold in her youth, and you can bet Abram couldn't wait to get his youthful hands on her. In that passion that comes with youth, they were not too worried that she did not become pregnant and I dare say it was not an issue to start with.

But fast track forward some 50 years it became a big problem especially after Abram was told he would have "seed". The passions of youth had burnt to a smouldering contentment but this was raking up the difficult past, which Sarai thought had been, sadly, laid to rest. Abram knew of no other way to make a baby than by sexual intercourse. Today they would be put on a fertilisation course, had IVF or some hormone therapy, but there was little option for the couple. I imagine that Abram got into the swing of things and dutifully went about the task of having sex most nights, but Sarai must have known it was of no use. It wasn't like when they were young and full of life, this was a chore.

And after 10 years Sarai had grown tired of the task. She dutifully went about it, trying to conceive but there was no pleasure in it, no joy, no excitement, the electricity that burned them up in passion had gone. Sarai began to look for alternatives. She could have resorted to love apples, the use of mandrakes, *Gen 30:15 And she said unto her, Is it a small matter that thou hast taken my husband? and wouldest thou take away my son's mandrakes also? And Rachel said, Therefore he shall lie with thee to night for thy son's mandrakes. Gen 30:16 And Jacob came out of the field in the evening, and Leah went out to meet him, and said, Thou must come in unto me; for surely I have hired thee with my son's mandrakes. And he lay with her that night.* Rachel had in desperation swapped a night with her husband for "love apples". Though these do not appear to be available to Sarai.

She must have talked about it with her husband and perhaps to fulfil her husband's desire, the thinking came around to using Hagar as a surrogate. This may have occurred in the girl's presence as she had been living with them for years and had become a feature in the household. What she thought of it we do not know, but they all acquiesced to the plan.

If only they had known the Proverb, or perhaps it was them who contributed to it, *Pro 30:21 For three things the earth is disquieted, and for four which it cannot bear: Pro 30:22 For a servant when he reigneth; and a fool when he is filled with meat; Pro 30:23 For an odious woman when she is married; and **an handmaid that is heir to her mistress.***

The handmaid was about to disquiet the earth. She who was handmaid to her mistress is now to assume her mistress's position, *Gen 16:4 And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived: and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes.* I am not sure she was despised so much, as her adopting a superior attitude.

Gen 16:4 Abram slept with Hagar, and she became pregnant. When Hagar realized this, she became very proud and began to feel that she was better than Sarai her owner. ERV.....Gen 16:4 And he went

in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was lightly esteemed in her eyes. Darby.

I think Sarai realised what she had done and the cure was far worse than the symptoms. But also something they had not considered in their haste. They had committed to defacing the image of Christ in marriage. Adam may have committed the original sin, but it appears he was faithful in marriage. *Mar 10:6 But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. Mar 10:7 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; Mar 10:8 And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. Mar 10:9 What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.*

Was it adultery, polygamy or polygyny that they had committed? Polygamy/polygyny, is "the practice or custom of having more than one wife or husband at the same time. What does the Bible say? *Deu 21:15 If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated: Deu 21:16 Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn: Deu 21:17 But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his.*

This appears acceptable under the Law and provision was made for it, *Exo 21:9 And if he have betrothed her unto his son, he shall deal with her after the manner of daughters. Exo 21:10 If he take him another wife; her food, her raiment, and her duty of marriage, shall he not diminish. Exo 21:11 And if he do not these three unto her, then shall she go out free without money.*

The law distinguished between the rights of a free woman and a slave, *Lev 25:46 And ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them for a possession; they shall be your bondmen for ever: but over your brethren the children of Israel, ye shall not rule one over another with rigour.*

Marriage gained a concession under law which is done away with in the New Testament, *Mat 19:8 He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. Mat 19:9 And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.* Apart from polygyny, there was the act of dismissing the woman, putting her away. Jesus makes one exception, for adultery, all trivial causes He dismisses.

Adultery is a voluntary sexual activity (as sexual intercourse) between a married man and someone other than his wife or between a married woman and someone other than her husband. It differs from voluntary unions, or multiple partner marriages, in this aspect, as far as I can see. Under Law a man can contract another wife by mutual agreement, and this a polygynous marriage. Where the persons decide to have a relationship **without** the agreement of another party (the husband, wife, father) it is called an adulterous relationship. So for example, David's relationship with Bathsheba, was adulterous, as Urijah had not consented to it. If Bathsheba had been single and gave her consent it would have been polygyny. While a woman may never take multiple men, it is permissible

for a man to take multiple women to himself in Torah. **This is polygyny, not polygamy.** Why? Consider it in the context of Christ and the Church, the One and the many.

In the New Testament, officers of the Church and recipients of charity must hold to the, one man one woman, model, *1Ti 3:2 The overseer then must be irreproachable, husband of one wife, sober, discreet, decorous, hospitable, apt to teach; 1Ti 3:12 Let the ministers be husbands of one wife, conducting their children and their own houses well: 1Ti 5:9 Let a widow be put upon the list, being of not less than sixty years, having been wife of one man.* This is showing Christ and the Church to the world.

So going back to our story, did Abram uphold marriage according to the tradition of his father Adam? No, he did not. Was the act a sin? It was a sin of circumstance, which the Lord made provision for the “hardness of men’s hearts”. There could be other worse sins committed without this concession, sins like murder!

Abram and Sarai, in haste, had introduced someone else into their marriage and the type of Christ is broken, *2Co 11:2 For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. 2Co 11:3 But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.*

The serpent, satan had come around, lisping his words, making Adam and Eve see the fruit was good to eat, and here in the future he told Sarai and Abram that taking another wife was not so bad as it would have the desired result. In that moment, when God was silent, paradise was lost for a second time.

Gen 16:4 And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived: and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes.

Thorns and thistles sprang up in their relationship. What seemed like a good idea was not at all that good. There are curses all around. The triple relationship implodes. The blame game begins.

But as usual, God has a plan.

29. Fallout

Gen 16:4 And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived: and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes. Gen 16:5 And Sarai said unto Abram, My wrong be upon thee: I have given my maid into thy bosom; and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes: the LORD judge between me and thee. Gen 16:6 But Abram said unto Sarai, Behold, thy maid is in thy hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee. And when Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face.

Before we start judging these people by today’s knowledge, let us remind ourselves of this, they did not have the wealth of inspiration and fellowship to support them in their decisions. That said, they are home now, in the Glory, and that whatever they did wrong they are forgiven, and they have

become an example to us in the New Testament, *1Pe 3:5 For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: 1Pe 3:6 Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.* We have not arrived home, so we must take care at every step, lest we fall, and not hold them up to scorn.

Looking at the origins of this debacle, I am treading in a minefield, but at least in giving an opinion I am not being a coward and staying silent. In scenes reminiscent of Eden, the “blame game” begins. Eve was deceived and caused Adam to sin, *1Ti 2:14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.*

The woman gets the blame so often for the failure in relationships, but look at what the scripture says, *1Pe 3:7 Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto **the weaker vessel**, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.* It takes two to tango, as the saying goes and Abram, as the stronger vessel, was duty bound to help his wife.

The woman is the weaker vessel, but what is she weak in? She is certainly not weak as far as bearing pain goes, nor is she weak in her mind but often the superior to the man. She is the equal of man, and as far as the creation goes she has the same attributes of God, *Gen 1:27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.* Man and woman were in one body, the man, at the creation, so God made them both in His image.

The word “weaker”, it seems to me, applies to her physical being, and man has a duty to uphold her as “*heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.*” He has a duty of care. Wives that do not get this benefit of care, turn rogue. When men leave Christ out of the equation, the woman will function so as to get their strength and support elsewhere.

Because Solomon’s wives were neglected concerning their duty to Christ, they turned after other things, *1Ki 11:2 Of the nations concerning which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love. 1Ki 11:3 And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart.* Oh yes, he loved them, but not enough to direct their way, and because of this neglect they turned him away from God. If only he had listened to his mother. *Pro 31:10 Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.* He had not contributed to polishing the gem stones, but left the diamond in the rough.

Many wives, had left Solomon, without a wife. There is no way that he could have spent time with them as individuals each day. With 1,000 woman knocking on his door, he could only have spared them 1 minute each and that would have taken him about 16½ hours to complete. Then there were the affairs of state, and the judging of the people to contend with. When did he sleep? No, he was spread so thin he could not hope to cope.

Samson had wife problems, all of his own selfish making, *Jdg 14:16 And Samson's wife wept before him, and said, Thou dost but hate me, and lovest me not: thou hast put forth a riddle unto the children of my people, and hast not told it me. And he said unto her, Behold, I have not told it my*

*father nor my mother, and shall I tell it thee? Jdg 14:17 And she wept before him the seven days, while their feast lasted: and it came to pass on the seventh day, that he told her, **because she lay sore upon him:** and she told the riddle to the children of her people.*

The woman has developed a skill to compliment her weakness. She can listen to her voice over and over, without tiring, *Pro 27:15 A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike.* It weakens a man and he capitulates.

We as the Church, have many selfish prayers, ill considered, sometimes downright wrong. We pray without going to our husband Christ for guidance, we think it is importunity but it is, *"a continual dropping in a very rainy day"*. Asking in Jesus Name is far more than dropping a request, *Joh 14:13 And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. Joh 14:14 If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.* Asking in the Name, means in the person of, having agreed it before. It is not asking for everything and anything. The church must come across like these wives of old, asking for everything.

Sarai and Abram may have talked about the matter of childlessness, but I do not think there was agreement. If they had agreed they would have been in unity whatever the outcome, but clearly they were not, and this led to blaming Abram, blame shifting.

Why do people shift the blame? It could be they never sorted out the issues in their own mind and the wrong they now see, is attributable to someone else but due to their oversight. It could be that when things go wrong, the first thing people look for is a scapegoat and never consider that they could be wrong. It is an approach that makes you look better than your fellow sinner.

Dwight D. Eisenhower said, "The search for a scapegoat is the easiest of all hunting expeditions."

Shannon L. Alder said, "Evil originates not in the absence of guilt; but in our effort to escape it."

Scapegoating often becomes an important part of conflict. "Once scapegoating is perceived to be successful in generating positive feelings in perpetrators, there is likely to be reluctance to give it up. The scapegoated provide a ready explanation for troubles. Therefore, there is relatively little incentive for the perpetrator to give it up. For the scapegoated, they are left with few good options: to flee, to assimilate, or to fight back. The scapegoats, outsiders, immigrants, minorities, 'deviants', are then persecuted, enabling the scapegoaters to discharge and distract from their negative feelings, which are replaced or overtaken by a crude but consoling sense of affirmation and self-righteous indignation." From Eric Brahm, "Scapegoating." *Beyond Intractability*.

A good example of a historical scapegoat is Marie Antoinette, Queen of Louis XVI of France, whom the French people called l'Autre-chienne, a pun playing on Autrichienne [Austrian woman] and autre chienne [other bitch], and accused of being profligate and promiscuous. When Marie Antoinette arrived in France to marry the then heir to the throne, the country had already been near bankrupted by the reckless spending of Louis XV, and the young and naïve foreign princess quickly became the unwitting target of the people's mounting ire.

It soon becomes revenge. The George Floyd case in America is sad on a number of levels. Whatever he did or did not do, the death sentence is the prerogative of the court not the police, and if he was

guilty of anything it should have been settled by the courts. The outcry against the police has become a movement against the police and the outcome of the trial, although a victory for the black people, will not achieve the reconciliation hoped for. On the contrary the cheering and clapping at the result of the trial, showed the polarisation that has occurred. There are no winners in this, only losers. As was said, “the Scapegoaters discharge and distract from their negative feelings, which are replaced or overtaken by a crude but consoling sense of affirmation and self-righteous indignation.”

The “eye for an eye”, the *lex talionis*, the law of retribution, is but a stop gap for the hard heart. Jesus said: *Mat 6:12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. Mat 6:13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. Mat 6:14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: Mat 6:15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

In all of this, the righteousness of God is neglected in place of the righteousness of man. When we, for whatever reason, right or wrong, feel ourselves hurt, feel slighted, feel sinned against, we turn on the offensive, and that is where we declare our own righteousness. We say, look, I am hurt and it not my fault, and we go on the attack. We attack the other person in order to vindicate ourselves. We forget this fundamental truth: *Psa 130:3 If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? Psa 130:4 But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.*

We are all sinners, saved by grace, but some when “saved” turn on their brethren. They become self-righteous, *Luk 18:9 And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Luk 18:10 Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. Luk 18:11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. Luk 18:12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. Luk 18:13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. Luk 18:14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*

When we become a Christian, I suppose we look at it a bit like joining the boy scouts. We award ourselves badges for achievements, badges of righteousness. Every badge we gain is sown on with pride. It is our achievement, our gain, a milestone in our progression to heaven. We forget those “achievements” have been made by somebody else. We got the “badges” not by our own endeavour but by the grace of God. How soon we forget. We become like the Pharisee, “*I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican*”. Instead of us all saying, *mea culpa*, I am responsible, we hide behind our own righteousness.

The family of Abram falls foul of this. Sarai says “*mea culpa*”, I am responsible, but let the outcome fall upon you Abram. *Gen 16:5 And Sarai said unto Abram, My wrong be upon thee: I have given my maid into thy bosom; and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes: the LORD judge between me and thee.* I cannot help feeling the Sarai is justifiably angry at the outcome. She knew that she was wrong in what had happened and although Abram may have been a passive,

willing partner, he too has played an equal part in the matter. Sarai feels that he too should share the guilt.

How much of this was in Sarai's mind and how much of it was real we do not know. Sarai was despised by Hagar as soon as Hagar became pregnant. Why? It may be the guilt of what Sarai had done that played on her mind and she began to look upon Hagar with a certain envy. She excuses her behaviour by saying, *"I was despised in her eyes"*. But that is only Sarai's view of how it went, possibly a half truth. It could equally be that Sarai despised Hagar **first** making Hagar feel uncomfortable, she then got back at Sarai despising her. **But the Lord does not hold it against Hagar.**

Abram's response was to throw the ball back to Sarai. "You deal with the problem". He does not attempt to mediate between them. Perhaps they are too contentious, *Pro 21:9 It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house.*

Sarai then dealt "hardly" with her, *Gen 16:6 But Abram said unto Sarai, Behold, thy maid is in thy hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee. And when Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face.* What Sarai did to Hagar, what constituted dealing hardly with her is not said, but it was enough to make her get away from Sarai. I do not think it reflects well upon Sarai and upon Abram, but they did it, like so many people in ignorance, *Act 3:17 And now, brothers, I know that you acted according to ignorance, as also did your rulers.*

If they did anything wrong it was this, not waiting for God's answer to His promise. God had sworn by Himself that He would give Abram seed and that is an end to the matter. Perhaps Abram is being given a lesson, and that is if God promises He will perform it even in extreme circumstances, *Heb 11:17 By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Heb 11:18 Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Heb 11:19 **Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.***

Abram is beginning to see that it is not just words that issue from the mouth of God but deeds and His ways are far above our ways and thinking, *Isa 40:25 To whom then will you compare Me, or am I equaled, says the Holy One? Isa 40:26 Lift up your eyes on high and look: Who has created these? Who brings out their host by number? By greatness of vigor, and might of power, He calls them all by names; not one is lacking.*

30. Who does God speak to?

Gen 16:7 And the angel of the LORD found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur. Gen 16:8 And he said, Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go? And she said, I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai. Gen 16:9 And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands.

Hagar has been cast out into the wilderness and Sarai and Abram have been given time to consider their action towards her. We may have thought that she was completely on her own, but we would

have been wrong to assume that. This is the first time “Messenger of Jehovah” is used in Scripture, and it is used 4 times here in verses 7, 9, 10, and 11.

Before we speculate on the person designated here, who does Hagar think that He is? She thinks He is God, *Gen 16:13 And she called the name of the LORD that spake unto her, **Thou God seest me:** for she said, Have I also here looked after him that seeth me? Gen 16:14 Wherefore the well was called Beerlahairoi; behold, it is between Kadesh and Bered.*

Let us look at the Scriptures 2009 transliteration, *Gen 16:13 And she called the Name of יהוה who spoke to her, “You are the Ėl who sees,” for she said, “Even here have I seen after Him who sees me?” Gen 16:14 That is why the well was called Be’ěr Laḥai Ro’i, see, it is between Qaḏěsh and Bered.* TS2009.

Hagar says that it was Jehovah who spoke to her, the Mighty God, El, who sees her. She named the place “Be’ěr Laḥai Ro’i”. Beer Lahai Roi literally means “the well of him that lives and sees me” or “the well of the vision of life.” Regardless of the exact translation, Hagar named the location thus because the Living God saw her situation and intervened to give her hope and comfort.

The same location is mentioned two other times as the place where Isaac was living, *Gen 24:62 And Isaac came from the way of the well Lahairoi; for he dwelt in the south country, and Gen 25:11 And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac; and Isaac dwelt by the well Lahairoi.* It was there that two sons of Abraham buried their father, *Gen 25:9 And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre; but more of this later God willing.*

I am reminded of another well, and another meeting, *Joh 4:28 The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Joh 4:29 Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ? Joh 4:30 Then they went out of the city, and came unto him.* She could just as well spoken, “and she called the name of the LORD that spake unto her, **Thou God seest me:** for she said, Have I also here looked after him that seeth me?” **Is not this the Christ?**

The person of the Angel is all powerful and will perform what he says and the Angel of the LORD is speaking in a way that only God would speak, only God can multiply someone’s offspring and make promises like that, *Gen 16:10 And the angel of the LORD said unto her, **I will multiply thy seed exceedingly,** that it shall not be numbered for multitude. Gen 16:11 And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, **and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the LORD hath heard thy affliction.***

Consider this servant, the Egyptian woman, carrying a child and cast out from her home. What hope is there for her? “Beer Lahai Roi” can also be a reminder to us that the Living God sees our plight. When we were enslaved by sin and under the sentence of death, He saw us, that is, He knew our condition and had pity. El Roi, the God Who Sees, has done everything necessary to save us, coming to us in a manger, which led to a cross and a glorious resurrection.

God indeed sees our plight but does He always act like this, saving the soul and promising an inheritance? Did you see God’s hand in your life or did it take some event to bring your ear to listen?

It generally takes a significant event to produce faith. *Act 2:37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Act 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

Does God hear sinners who pray to him? Is He willing, sometimes, to answer their prayers? We would not have a Bible if God was unwilling to communicate with sinners! Scripture was inspired and written specifically so that all humans would have the means to come to repentance and change their ways. The Bible is full of examples where God was not only willing to hear sinners but also, in some cases, to initiate contact and talk with them!

God initiated a discussion with both Adam and Eve **after** they became sinners by eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He also initiated a conversation with Cain after his offering was rejected and after he murdered, in cold blood, his younger brother Abel.

Jesus, as God in the flesh, spent his entire ministry preaching the gospel and calling sinners to repentance, *Luk 5:31 And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. Luk 5:32 I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.* He interacted, on a regular basis, with those considered the most disobedient.

What few people realize is that Jesus, apart from John the Baptist, never spoke to a converted human (someone who had the spirit of God in them) during his entire ministry. This includes both His mother and the disciples, who had His spirit with them but not yet in them!"

The truth is, we are all sinners who have fallen far short of his glory, *Rom 3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;* Our heavenly Father is more than willing to look upon and respond to those willing to humble themselves before him.

God has stated, however, that he will not respond to those who are indulging in evil and refuse to repent, *1Pe 3:12 For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.*

I do not think as a rule, God comes along and speaks to a man or woman, without the preliminaries being taken care of. If He did, then it would lead to a strange relationship, *Pro 15:29 The LORD is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous.* I think that Hagar must have had an encounter before, and that she was a believer in the "God who sees me".

So the Lord did not just help Abram's line but his descendents that were not of the seed. In fact, God is the God of all people. The Jewish nation, Israel, were a chosen people, but they did not live up to the privileges given to them, *Rom 9:4 Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Rom 9:5 Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen. Rom 9:6 Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Rom 9:7 Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. Rom 9:8 That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.*

Israel was a sort of experiment in the faith, a chosen people but a people who mostly failed because no man could become righteous on his own, despite them having the advantages of “*the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises*”. He needed a deliverer who would take away that fundamental flaw in their nature, **SIN**.

So the Jew had an advantage, but it still did not save him, *Rom 3:1 What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Rom 3:2 Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God. Rom 3:3 For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?..... Rom 3:9 What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: **for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin;** Rom 3:10 As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: Rom 3:11 There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.*

In God’s eyes all were fallen, all were sinful, “*for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin*”. That sin extends to Abram and his immediate family. So that when God extends the covenant to Him, it is not because there is any merit in him, and we should not think that the nation that springs from his loins has any merit either, “***they are all under sin***”.

So if God has concluded all under sin, where does the Jew and the Gentile stand? *Rom 9:19 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has ever resisted His will?" Rom 9:20 But indeed, O man, who are you to be answering back against God? Surely the thing formed will not say to him who formed it, "Why did you made me like this?" Rom 9:21 Or does not the potter have authority over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honour and the other for dishonour? Rom 9:22 But what if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make known His power, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath having been prepared for destruction, Rom 9:23 and so that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, Rom 9:24 even us whom He called, **not only of the Jews, but also of the Gentiles?***

Both Jew and Gentile are saved by the Grace of God, and Jesus who came to rescue both from the curse of sin. Listen to this: *Luk 5:30 But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners? Luk 5:31 And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. Luk 5:32 **I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*** Christ came for all who saw themselves in need of a physician. It did not matter if they were scribes, Pharisees, publicans or sinners. He came to save them all, Jews and Greeks. If He could work miracles on the outward how much more on the inward, *Luk 5:22 But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts? Luk 5:23 Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk? Luk 5:24 But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house.*

I am labouring this point because it must be brought home! All the world lies in sin and death and only one can save it, *Joh 4:42 And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying:*

for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the **Saviour of the world**. Or more exactly, the Saviour of the Cosmos.

It is far more than redeeming fallen man, but redeeming the fallen Universe, Rom 8:20 *For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Rom 8:21 Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Rom 8:22 For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. Rom 8:23 And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.*

There are some verses in Isaiah which are relevant, Isa 56:3 *Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the LORD, speak, saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree. Isa 56:4 For thus saith the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; Isa 56:5 Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls **a place and a name** (yad v'shem) better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off.*

Modern Israel have taken that word for the name of the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem which they call "Yad vaShem", a hand and a name, a signpost and a name, or a "place and a name". It is a memorial museum to all the millions of Jews murdered by the Nazis.

But the words of Isaiah are not to the Jews but the "strangers". Isa 56:3 *Neither let the son of the **stranger**, that hath joined himself to the LORD, speak, saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people.* God gives "place and a name" to His gentile children.

When Christ was there with Hagar, as the Angel of the Lord, He was announcing to this Egyptian gentile woman that He would bless her seed, even though Abram as yet had no seed through Sarai. They would be redeemed by Him as much as the seed of Sarai. They would all be one in Christ.

That also goes to show why the land of the promise extends to far more than the land of Israel, Joh 10:16 *And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.*

We should guard against the exclusivism of Israel to the neglect of the world. The Lord will save whom He will out of all the people on earth and we should not look back to the glory days of Israel, now gone, but forward to the glories of Christ and His Kingdom of all people.

31. Thirteen years later

Gen 16:15 *And Hagar bare Abram a son: and Abram called his son's name, which Hagar bare, Ishmael. Gen 16:16 And Abram was fourscore and six years old, when Hagar bare Ishmael to Abram. Gen 17:1 And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. Gen 17:2 And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.*

We often think that Christianity is about us and our wants and that God exists to satisfy our needs. He is seen as ever present, waiting on us, at our beck and call. He is seen as the go to God, every day answering the trivial needs of what we want. Should I have porridge or cornflakes, should I wear this suit or that tie, should I buy this car or that house? It is true that scripture says: *Psa 37:4 Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Psa 37:5 Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.* But that comes with the proviso that you delight yourself in the Lord. The relationship comes first and the things of this life come second.

There is nothing written about Abram's breakfast, his tents, camels, trivia of life, but I am sure he gave thanks for what he had. It is what he did not have that is the concern of scripture, and there is a period of 13 years when the Lord is silent on the subject of the seed. Here was a long period between conversations. Therefore, should we expect answers to our prayers at a time suitable to us? God's concerns and our concerns are not always compatible and His timing suits Him not us.

What are God's concerns as far as Abram is concerned? I will answer this by going to the END and working backwards. We learn that God is a God of **time**, until it is of no use to Him, *Rev 10:5 And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, Rev 10:6 And swore by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer:*

"Time" is God's way of showing us our mortality. If we did not see entropy, the measure of disorder in a system, the progress of decay, we would not appreciate our mortality. Job did, *Job 19:25 For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: Job 19:26 And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God:* From youth to old age, time is relentlessly eating us up. That is why it is better to, *Ecc 12:1 Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.*

It is always in God's "time" and the best "time", stamped on ancient history. The hands of time are never so clearly documented in scripture as this, *Luk 3:1 Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Luk 3:2 Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.*

It is a time better documented, than even the birth of our Saviour. Why? Because it marked the entrance of the Heavenly Kingdom, *Mat 3:1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, Mat 3:2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Mat 3:3 For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.* Jesus birth was important, but it was secondary to His mission, which was the Kingdom of Heaven.

What is the topic that Jesus likes to talk about? It is the Kingdom. Matthew's Gospel mostly uses the term Kingdom of Heaven, and he uses it some 33 times. In the Four Gospels, the term Kingdom of God is used about 50 times. Why does Matthew use Kingdom of Heaven? Probably because he is

addressing the Jews, and he wanted them to get it in their heads, that God had a Kingdom beyond this world.

Whether you like to call it Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven, matters not. *Mat 4:23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and **preaching the gospel of the kingdom**, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. Mar 1:14 Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, **preaching of the kingdom of God**, Mar 1:15 And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.* It is the same thing, but importantly, it is a Kingdom.

A Kingdom has a King, and the King is Jesus, *Joh 18:36 Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence. Joh 18:37 Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, **Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born**, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.*

It was His message on the Kingdom of God, and it makes the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, as well as humanity's beginning and end, all come together in one great cosmic masterpiece. In fact, not only was it the central message that Jesus preached, but it was also the one he sent his disciples to preach and to live. We have the same mandate.

What have we seen? 1. The date of the Kingdom of Heaven's inception 2. The preaching of the Kingdom, 3. The preacher of the Kingdom, Jesus 4. The King Jesus 5. The location of His Kingdom, heaven.

The rest of the Gospels are supportive of this ministry of the Kingdom. The need to change the attitude, repentance from sin, as a requirement of citizenship of the Kingdom. The making whole of individuals, healing to restore them to fellowship as citizens of the Kingdom. The development of the Christ like character, a righteousness as befits citizens of the Kingdom. Then there is the death of the King to fulfil all righteousness.

But it does not end there for the King of Kings is triumphant and in death defeats the devil and becomes Lord over all. *Rev 11:15 And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The **kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.** Rev 11:16 And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, Rev 11:17 Saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned. Rev 11:18 And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth. Rev 11:19 And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.*

That the Kingdom of Christ is triumphant, is not simply a New Testament phenomenon. It is conceived in the Old Testament. It does not appear without us seeing its origin in the life of Abram. It comes from this desire planted in him for a seed. That seed was not Ishmael, it was Isaac. He was a special gift of God, and whether Abram had jumped the gun or not, it was to become quite clear that Isaac was the seed.

In fact, the first Gospel in the New Testament, traces Christ from Abram through Isaac, not Ishmael, *Mat 1:1 The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Mat 1:2 Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren;* The New Testament is predicated upon the “seed” and so provides continuity between the two testaments. The testaments are linked together by Jesus Christ. It is essential that we see Jesus providing the continuity from Abram to the New Testament and that what flows out of the Old Testament is a continuum with the New Testament. Before he describes Jesus activities and the Gospel, Matthew gives his genealogical record, followed by his miraculous birth record just so that we might have no doubt Who we are dealing with.

Why do men turn to the history of Israel and not the history of the “seed” when they look at scripture? Why do they turn to the lesser person Jacob (Israel) and not to the greater person of Christ? Did Israel save them? No, to the contrary, he put them in slavery. Being Israel was a two edged sword. It offered them a chance to become God’s people but it carried with it the curse of the Law. Israel far from being the deliverer needed a deliverer for themselves.

At the close of the divided Kingdom, that is the Kingdom of Israel and the Kingdom of Judah, about 730 BC, Israel collapsed, taken captive by Shalmaneser king of the Assyrians, *2Ki 18:9 And it came to pass in the fourth year of king Hezekiah, which was the seventh year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, that Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against Samaria, and besieged it. 2Ki 18:10 And at the end of three years they took it: even in the sixth year of Hezekiah, that is the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel, Samaria was taken. 2Ki 18:11 And the king of Assyria did carry away Israel unto Assyria, and put them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes: 2Ki 18:12 Because they obeyed not the voice of the LORD their God, but transgressed his covenant, and all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded, and would not hear them, nor do them.*

Hosea the prophet, a contemporary with Hoshea king of Israel, came with a message to Israel that summed them up, *Hos 11:1 When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt. Hos 11:2 As they called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images. Hos 11:3 I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them. Hos 11:4 I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them. Hos 11:5 He shall not return into the land of Egypt, but the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return.*

Israel was a wayward child from the beginning and despite God’s protestations, they were insistent on going their own way, of murmuring against Him, of disobeying Him. One of the great laws that they broke, which incidentally led to the captivity of Judah, was the Sabbath. The land Sabbath, *2Ch 36:19 And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the*

*palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof. 2Ch 36:20 And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: 2Ch 36:21 To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, **until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths**: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years.*

The Sabbath, and the laws relating to it were designed to show God as the Creator God, the God who made the Heavens and Earth in 6 days, *Exo 20:8 Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Exo 20:9 Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: Exo 20:10 But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: Exo 20:11 **For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day**: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.*

It is six literal days for the Jews. Perhaps it is more interesting what they did in it. The modern Sabbatarians go to church, but Israel did not. There was no church I know, but neither did they go to the Tabernacle or Temple to worship. For most it was too far to go to. So they rested at home, *Lev 23:3 Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: **it is the sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings***. It was the acknowledgement of the Creator.

It was the origin of the House Church which continued into the New Testament. There appears to be no divine authority for the synagogue, but it does not appear to be wrong, it just acts as a repository for the scriptures. The New Testament church should not be compared to the synagogue, and the idea that the Church comes from this is not so, in the light of house churches.

I find it strange that Christians who acknowledge Christ's miracles, cannot acknowledge the creation in 6 days. He who healed the lame, the lepers, the deaf, the blind, the dead, instantaneously, is not credited with creating the cosmos in 6 days. What do they not understand? Christ is the healer but also He is the Creator, *Col 1:15 Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: Col 1:16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: Col 1:17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. Col 1:18 And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.*

They were to contemplate their God, the Lord of Creation on the seventh day. The Jews tried to make amends by the minute laws they developed to avoid breaking the Sabbath but by then, they were deserted by God.

But there is an even greater distinctive of the Jews, as we shall see next, namely circumcision. Even this, though it was observed by all, the spirit of the ordinance was lost on most of the people, *Rom 2:26 Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? Rom 2:27 And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? Rom 2:28 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: Rom 2:29 **But***

he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Instead of the Jews, that is Israel, recognising the seed of Christ, working together to support Him, they were at odds with Him. They persecuted Him, *Joh 8:37 I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you. Joh 8:38 I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father. Joh 8:39 They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. Joh 8:40 But now ye seek to kill me, **a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham.***

Jesus is not saying that Abraham lied to the people, but that the truth now given by Jesus is directly given to Him from the mouth of God, in the fullness of that message.

That is why we labour week by week, to bring the truth home to ourselves and others, not for its own sake, but to proclaim to the Creation, that there is a pocket of truth, a remnant, still holding those ancient truths which stretch all the way back to Abraham. That truth will be preached to the end of time.

32. Un-circumcision and circumcision (part 1)

Gen 17:3 And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, Gen 17:4 As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Gen 17:5 Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. Gen 17:6 And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. Gen 17:7 And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. Gen 17:8 And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. Gen 17:9 And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. Gen 17:10 This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. Gen 17:11 And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. Gen 17:12 And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. Gen 17:13 He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. Gen 17:14 And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.

According to the British Journal of Medical Practice, “Medically, circumcision is the removal of the sleeve of skin and mucosal tissue which normally covers the glans of the penis, known as the foreskin. The word circumcision derives from the Latin circum (meaning ‘around’) and caedere

(meaning 'to cut'). It is one of the oldest surgical operations known to have been performed, with the earliest available records dating this ancient procedure back to at least 6000 years BC."

This is taken from an article, "The troubled history of the foreskin" by Jessica Wapner

Circumcision has been practised for millennia. Right now, in America, it is so common that foreskins are somewhat rare, and may become more so. A few weeks before the protests, the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) had suggested that healthcare professionals talk to men and parents about the benefits of the procedure, which include protection from some sexually transmitted diseases, and the risks, which the CDC describes as low. But as the protesters wanted drivers to know, there is no medical consensus on this issue. Circumcision isn't advised for health reasons in Europe, for instance, because the benefits remain unclear. Meanwhile, Western organisations are paying for the circumcision of millions of African men in an attempt to rein in HIV – a campaign that critics say is also based on questionable evidence.

Men have been circumcised for thousands of years, yet our thinking about the foreskin seems as muddled as ever. And a close examination of this muddle raises disturbing questions. Is this American exceptionalism justified? Should we really be funding mass circumcision in Africa? Or by removing the foreskins of men, boys and newborns, are we actually committing a violation of human rights?

The tomb of Ankhmahor, a high-ranking official in ancient Egypt, is situated in a vast burial ground just outside Cairo. A picture of a man standing upright is carved into one of the walls. His hands are restrained, and another figure kneels in front of him, holding a tool to his penis. Though there is no definitive explanation of why circumcision began, many historians believe this relief, carved more than four thousand years ago, is the oldest known record of the procedure.

The best-known circumcision ritual, the Jewish ceremony of brit milah (מילה בְּרִית), is also thousands of years old. (מול = mûl, a primitive root; to cut short, that is, curtail specifically the prepuce, to circumcise). It survives to this day, as do others practised by Muslims and some African tribes. But American attitudes to circumcision have a much more recent origin. As medical historian David Gollaher recounts in his book *Circumcision: A History of the World's Most Controversial Surgery*, early Christian leaders abandoned the practice, realising perhaps that their religion would be more attractive to converts if surgery wasn't required. Circumcision disappeared from Christianity, and the secular Western cultures that descended from it, for almost two thousand years.

I approach this subject from its two sides. From the side of circumcision and the side of un-circumcision. If we know what it is, we must also know what it is not. I will explore un-circumcision first. Paul says in Romans: *Rom 4:11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of **the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also.***

Who carried out the operation? If Abram was circumcised with the other males, surely he would have been too sore to carry out the operation, *Gen 34:24 And unto Hamor and unto Shechem his son hearkened all that went out of the gate of his city; and every male was circumcised, all that went out of the gate of his city. Gen 34:25 And it came to pass on the third day, when they were sore, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males.*

It is possible that Sarah would have conducted it. I say this because Zipporah did to her household, *Exo 4:24 And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the LORD met him, and sought to kill him. Exo 4:25 Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me. Exo 4:26 So he let him go: then she said, A bloody husband thou art, because of the circumcision.* There is nothing to stop a woman performing circumcision.

Abram received the sign, or mark of circumcision, as a seal of **“the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised”**. It was a “seal” (σφραγίς = sphragis) of a “sign” (σημεῖον = sēmeion), it was the stamp of the token, it was the outward form of the inward blessing.

To neglect to have this sign and seal put you outside of the covenant, *Gen 17:14 And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.* In fact you had to do nothing at all to break the covenant. It was the “do nothing” option. To sit on your thumbs, to be indecisive, was to break the covenant. *Luk 11:23 He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.* If you were not decisive in God’s eyes, you were regarded as against Him. If you could not make up your mind, He made it up for you. So do not think the “do nothing” option is neutral, it is not.

The “righteousness of faith” was given to Abram before he was circumcised, but the token of circumcision was given afterwards. Abram was declared right with God **before** he was circumcised. This was for a very specific reason, *Rom 4:11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: Rom 4:12 And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.* Abram was righteous by faith when he was un-circumcised, so he could be both the father of the un-circumcised and circumcised, the father of the gentile and the Jew.

If you think about it, the world, for thousands of years, from the time of Adam, had been living in un-circumcision and it was only now that it was introduced to men as a covenant sign. Adam was made “good” in God’s sight but he was made in un-circumcision by nature. Un-circumcision was good. In the Garden of Eden, there was an un-circumcised man, before the fall. Therefore in the Edenic state, there was un-circumcision and this was not sinful, and so we cannot say that circumcision or un-circumcision is sinful, except when God Himself says it is, for a particular reason, in a particular time.

Whether or not Abram understood the full implication of this ordinance is not known. However, it became much clearer with the passage of time. The son’s of Jacob use it as an instrument of cruelty, *Gen 35:23 The sons of Leah; Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, and Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and*

Issachar, and Zebulun: The sons, Simeon, Levi, get the men of Shechem to be circumcised as a ruse to destroy them, Gen 34:14 And they said unto them, We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one that is uncircumcised; for that were a reproach unto us.

The men of Shechem comply but are cruelly slain when recovering from the act of circumcision, *Gen 34:24 And unto Hamor and unto Shechem his son hearkened all that went out of the gate of his city; and every male was circumcised, all that went out of the gate of his city. Gen 34:25 And it came to pass on the third day, when they were sore, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males. Gen 34:26 And they slew Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went out.*

In that act, Levi, the head of the family of priests, shows his utter contempt for the law, and that contempt ran through Israel. It was the shape of things to come, *Jer 9:25 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will punish all them which are circumcised with the uncircumcised; Jer 9:26 Egypt, and Judah, and Edom, and the children of Ammon, and Moab, and all that are in the utmost corners, that dwell in the wilderness: for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart.*

There we see the physical act and the supernatural act, the circumcision of the flesh and the circumcision of the heart. If Israel had had the heart circumcised they would not have suffered rejection. If they had seen beyond the flesh to the spirit, they would have lived.

The distinction between circumcised and uncircumcised became a feature of the Jewish people, nay even a barrier between Israel and the gentile world. It was the rite of entry into Israel, *Exo 12:48 And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof.*

This difference, unseen by others since they covered their nakedness, was a sign of separation to God. For example, fruit could be uncircumcised, *Lev 19:23 And when ye shall come into the land, and shall have planted all manner of trees for food, then ye shall count the fruit thereof as uncircumcised: three years shall it be as uncircumcised unto you: it shall not be eaten of. Lev 19:24 But in the fourth year all the fruit thereof shall be holy to praise the LORD withal. Lev 19:25 And in the fifth year shall ye eat of the fruit thereof, that it may yield unto you the increase thereof: I am the LORD your God.* The fruit was separated by the people who were symbolically circumcising the land, separating the past heathen land from the new land of God.

Likewise, the people were circumcised when they entered the land, *Jos 5:5 Now all the people that came out were circumcised: but all the people that were born in the wilderness by the way as they came forth out of Egypt, them they had not circumcised. Jos 5:6 For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people that were men of war, which came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they obeyed not the voice of the LORD: unto whom the LORD sware that he would not shew them the land, which the LORD sware unto their fathers that he would give us, a land that floweth with milk and honey. Jos 5:7 And their children, whom he raised up in their stead, them Joshua circumcised: for they were uncircumcised, because they had not circumcised them by the*

way. *Jos 5:8 And it came to pass, when they had done circumcising all the people, that they abode in their places in the camp, till they were whole. Jos 5:9 And the LORD said unto Joshua, This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you. Wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal unto this day.*

The people of the generation born in the wilderness had not been circumcised. They are called “**the people that were men of war**”, or “goim” a term used of the gentile, the uncircumcised, not the people of Israel. They also could **not** have kept the Passover as uncircumcised men, *Exo 12:43 And the LORD said unto Moses and Aaron, This is the ordinance of the passover: There shall no stranger eat thereof: Exo 12:44 But every man's servant that is bought for money, when thou hast **circumcised him**, then shall he eat thereof. Exo 12:45 A foreigner and an hired servant shall not eat thereof. Exo 12:46 In one house shall it be eaten; thou shalt not carry forth ought of the flesh abroad out of the house; neither shall ye break a bone thereof. Exo 12:47 All the congregation of Israel shall keep it.*

So it would appear the Israelites had not, by virtue of being uncircumcised, kept the Passover for 38 years, until they entered the Promised Land. Was this by omission or by command? *Exo 12:24 And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons for ever. Exo 12:25 And it shall come to pass, **when ye be come to the land which the LORD will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service.** Exo 12:26 And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? Exo 12:27 That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the LORD'S passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses. And the people bowed the head and worshipped.*

It appears to teach that they were to observe it when they came into the land, but their disobedience delayed their entry and the hiatus occurred. If they delayed in the matter of circumcision and Passover, perhaps they did not use the Tabernacle to its full extent of worship either?

Is this why the book of Deuteronomy was written? Because there was a need to pick up the pieces from the Exodus and bring the people back to the task, after the generation of unbelievers had passed? *Deu 1:1 These be the words which Moses spake unto all Israel on this side Jordan in the wilderness, in the plain over against the Red sea, between Paran, and Tophel, and Laban, and Hazeroth, and Dizahab. Deu 1:2 (There are eleven days' journey from Horeb by the way of mount Seir unto Kadeshbarnea.) Deu 1:3 And it came to **pass in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first day of the month**, that Moses spake unto the children of Israel, according unto all that the LORD had given him in commandment unto them;*

The reason that perhaps the people were able to conduct the operation of circumcision in peace, was that the belligerents were scared of the Israelites, *Jos 5:1 And it came to pass, when all the kings of the Amorites, which were on the side of Jordan westward, and all the kings of the Canaanites, which were by the sea, heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of Jordan from before the children of Israel, until we were passed over, that their heart melted, neither was there spirit in them any more, because of the children of Israel.* There was the miraculous preservation of the people during the procedure.

Who performed the circumcision? The logistics were huge, and you know what a difficult thing it has been to vaccinate everyone during the current pandemic. Because of the number of persons they required lots of medics. *Jos 4:13 About forty thousand prepared for war passed over before the LORD unto battle, to the plains of Jericho.* I imagine there were a lot more in reserve. *Num 26:51 These were the numbered of the children of Israel, six hundred thousand and a thousand seven hundred and thirty.* The total number of men of war was 601,730. Did they all get circumcised?

Because of the discomfort the men underwent, I suggest the operation was conducted by the women. Incidentally they used flint or stone knives which are less prone to cause infection than iron knives, *Jos 5:2 At that time Jehovah said to Joshua, Make for yourself flint knives, and again circumcise the sons of Israel, the second time. Jos 5:3 And Joshua made flint knives for himself, and circumcised the sons of Israel at the hill of the foreskins.* LITV.

33. Un-circumcision and circumcision (part 2)

We have seen that circumcision was given as a sign and seal of God's covenant with Abram. Just what it meant becomes clearer with time and the growing awareness of its meaning. The spiritual meaning of circumcision becomes apparent in the uncircumcised heart.

Lev 26:40 If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; Lev 26:41 And that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: Lev 26:42 Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land. Lev 26:43 The land also shall be left of them, and shall enjoy her sabbaths, while she lieth desolate without them: and they shall accept of the punishment of their iniquity: because, even because they despised my judgments, and because their soul abhorred my statutes. Lev 26:44 And yet for all that, when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them: for I am the LORD their God.

An uncircumcised heart is a proud heart, a heart not humble before God. But this is also a prophecy to the nation of the Captivity in Babylon, for their pride. The very reason that they went into captivity was the failure to keep the land Sabbath, which reflected God's, not Israel's, ownership of the land, and they had to learn the lesson, *2Ch 36:20 And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: 2Ch 36:21 To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years.*

I wonder if the Israelite really heeded this, after all they had only just been delivered from Egypt?

You will observe the obvious, that women were not circumcised in the flesh. Was the covenant only to the male? No, it was not to the male. Although the woman was not circumcised, she was in virtue of her lineage, the daughter of a circumcised male, and considered to be circumcised, *Jdg 14:3 Then*

*his father and his mother said unto him, Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a **wife of the uncircumcised Philistines?** And Samson said unto his father, Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well. The woman was uncircumcised by virtue of her birth to an uncircumcised father, and a woman was circumcised in virtue of her birth to a circumcised father.*

The distinction grew to describe of all the inhabitants of Canaan as uncircumcised, rather than separate tribes, *1Sa 14:6 And Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armour, Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that the LORD will work for us: for there is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few.*

The great victory of the circumcised over the un-circumcised is seen in the battle of David and Goliath. *1Sa 17:26 And David spake to the men that stood by him, saying, What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine, and taketh away the reproach from Israel? for who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?* This historic battle was between the covenant people and the rebels, the circumcised and the un-circumcised, the spiritual and the natural man. And so the un-circumcised is likened to the wild beast. *1Sa 17:36 Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and **this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them**, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God.*

It was better to commit suicide than die by the hand of the uncircumcised, *1Sa 31:4 Then said Saul unto his armourbearer, Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith; lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and abuse me. But his armourbearer would not; for he was sore afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword, and fell upon it.* It was too sad to even talk about it, *2Sa 1:20 Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.*

There is a big leap from the circumcision of the flesh to the circumcision of the heart. How did you get your heart circumcised, how did you go from the natural to the spiritual? It was a work only the Lord could accomplish but it seems strange that the Lord commands us to do it. *Deu 10:16 Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked.* But how do I? *Deu 30:6 And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.*

It was essential that they do this, *Jer 4:4 Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.*

The act of circumcising was of higher precedence than Sabbath keeping, *Joh 7:22 Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision; (not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers ;) and ye on the sabbath day circumcise a man. Joh 7:23 If a man on the sabbath day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken; are ye angry at me, because I have made a man every whit whole on the sabbath day? Joh 7:24 Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.*

Circumcision was not in dispute for the Jew of the Old Testament, but come the New Testament it was an issue among believers, *Act 15:1 And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the*

brethren, and said, **Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.** Act 15:2 When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question..... Act 15:5 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, **That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.** Act 15:6 And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.

Some Jewish believers had come to associate the outward sign of circumcision with Salvation. It is easy to see that this also led to a view that because the circumcision was conducted upon infants, there was every reason to baptise/sprinkle infants. Lev 12:3 *And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised,* I happily confess that the means I believe in are immersion and the recipients mature people, at least those who can understand what they are doing. Yet, by whatever means you think the ordinance should be conducted, its efficacy, in both cases, does not rest upon the administering of circumcision in the flesh, or of baptism of the flesh. It must be taken to a whole new level.

How did Peter proceed to answer these pro-circumcisers? Well, he answered very graciously, Act 15:7 *And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.* Act 15:8 *And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us;* Act 15:9 *And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.* Act 15:10 *Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?* Act 15:11 *But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.*

We should understand that Peter is addressing the Jewish Christians and not the Gentiles. He says to the Jews of Jerusalem, God “*put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith*”, so why put a yoke upon the Gentiles necks (i.e. the law) that even our fathers were not able to bear. “*We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they*”. In a sense Peter did not answer the precise question, which was, they said, “*it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses*”.

Peter generalises the question and says in effect, you go your way and let them go their way, and we shall be saved, all together, “*through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ*”. It is a neat answer, and it contains in it the truth, that outward circumcision does not save you, likewise because you have been baptised, that will not save you either. It does not matter what arguments you hold on these subjects, the final decision belongs to the Judge of all the earth.

Peter does not engage in an argument with them, and it probably would not do any good as they were ingrained with Judaism. It would have been a waste of time. But he answers them wisely.

What matters is **not** whether you can argue for one position or another, circumcision, or un-circumcision, infant baptism or believers baptism, and you will not be considering the finer points of those arguments on the Day of the Lord but rather, how do you **know** that you have entered the life

of Christ and that you are in the Kingdom? Whatever signs and seals I have gotten from men, where does my soul go when I die?

We must take all of the earthly signs and seals to the next level, because the Lord Jesus says, “My Kingdom is not of this world”. The question is, how do the “signs and seals” relate to the life to come? Paul gives us the answer, *Rom 2:28 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: Rom 2:29 But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.*

All along, the Jew was not someone who had been circumcised in the flesh, outwardly, but someone who had by the grace of God, had his or her heart circumcised. It is in that mysterious way that God becomes real to you and the curtain is drawn back to reveal a whole new spiritual life. You do not keep the laws of God that you may become fit for the Kingdom, you find Christ first, *Mat 6:33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

How do I find Him? If you desire Him, if you want Him above all else, if you come to Him, you will find Him, *Joh 6:37 All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. Joh 6:38 For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. Joh 6:39 And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. Joh 6:40 And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.*

It is up to you whether you remain an outward, earthly conformist or a heavenly soul, it is in your hands not mine.

The prophets saw a time when the nation would be cleansed of the un-circumcised once and forever, *Isa 52:1 Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean.....Eze 32:27 And they shall not lie with the mighty that are fallen of the uncircumcised, which are gone down to hell with their weapons of war: and they have laid their swords under their heads, but their iniquities shall be upon their bones, though they were the terror of the mighty in the land of the living. Eze 32:28 Yea, thou shalt be broken in the midst of the uncircumcised, and shalt lie with them that are slain with the sword. Eze 32:29 There is Edom, her kings, and all her princes, which with their might are laid by them that were slain by the sword: they shall lie with the uncircumcised, and with them that go down to the pit. Eze 32:30 There be the princes of the north, all of them, and all the Zidonians, which are gone down with the slain; with their terror they are ashamed of their might; and they lie uncircumcised with them that be slain by the sword, and bear their shame with them that go down to the pit..... Eze 32:32 For I have caused my terror in the land of the living: and he shall be laid in the midst of the uncircumcised with them that are slain with the sword, even Pharaoh and all his multitude, saith the Lord GOD.*

The Temple of the Lord, that focus of the Heavenly Kingdom, is shown to Ezekiel and to us, in terms of Holiness, separation, keeping the clean from the unclean. But the Levites had failed to be honourable, *Eze 44:7 In that ye have brought into my sanctuary strangers, uncircumcised in heart,*

and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in my sanctuary, to pollute it, even my house, when ye offer my bread, the fat and the blood, and they have broken my covenant because of all your abominations.

When we looked at the vision of Ezekiel's Temple (Ezekiel chapter 40 ff), we notice that Zerubbabel's temple, the second Temple as it is known, rebuilt by Herod, the shadow temple, was under construction. We suggested that this Heavenly Temple was the idealised worship of God and was never commanded to be built. It perhaps takes its place beside the Temple in John's Apocalypse, as the goal of the righteous. There was an earthly shadow temple and a heavenly reality of that temple.

Looking at the worship in Ezekiel's Temple, we come across this phrase: *Eze 44:9 Thus saith the Lord GOD; No stranger, **uncircumcised in heart, nor uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into my sanctuary, of any stranger that is among the children of Israel.***

It is clear that the person worshipping in that Temple must have the physical mark of circumcision and the circumcision of the heart. But Paul appears to deny this, saying: *Rom 2:29 To be a real Jew you must obey the Law. True circumcision is something that happens deep in your heart, not something done to your body. And besides, you should want praise from God and not from humans.* CEV.

How are we to reconcile these positions? Imagine if you were trying to get a concept across to a person 100 or so years ago. How would you explain genetics, broadcasting, computers, internet, nuclear power, air travel, space travel and so on, when describing the future state of things? They were beyond the people of those times. The best way to describe the future was to use things that people were familiar with. The things that they were comfortable with, were used to describe the future, and in doing so did not reveal the actual means that God would use in that hidden future.

So if you said to those people that the, "*uncircumcised in heart, nor uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into my sanctuary, of any stranger that is among the children of Israel*" it would describe the ideal concept of worship and holiness in that undefined future. Fast forward to that future and you have the advent of Christ, His death for sin's forgiveness, His resurrection in power, the transition of the faithful to the Kingdom of Heaven and everlasting Glory.

Circumcision was the shedding of human blood in the making of an earthly Covenant, *Exo 4:25 Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me. Exo 4:26 So he let him go: then she said, A bloody husband thou art, because of the circumcision.* Hawker comments,

It is difficult to determine whether Zipporah meant this in anger, or whether it was an instance of faith. If the latter, it carries with it a sweet testimony of the holy joy of a parent, **that by the blood of the covenant her child was espoused to God in Christ.**

So this Covenant of circumcision was in blood, and the New Covenant is in blood, but the New cleanses us from all unrighteousness, *1Jn 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and **the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.***

It is true that in a manner of speaking, that I am circumcised in the flesh and the heart, by the atoning death of Christ. The circumcision pointed forward to a covenant greater than man could conceive, that is a covenant with Christ.

34. Name change

With the status of having entered into a Covenant with God, there comes a name change, *Gen 17:4 As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Gen 17:5 Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but **thy name shall be Abraham**; for a father of many nations have I made thee.....Gen 17:15 And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but **Sarah shall her name be**. Gen 17:16 And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her.* It was the cause of uncertain laughter in Abraham.

You will see why I have been using Abram and Sarai up to now (or trying to) but that all changes with the anticipation of an heir. A change of name for a change of status and this occurs often in scripture, *Gen 32:28 And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.....Isa 62:3 Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. Isa 62:4 Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the LORD delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married.*

The name changes are from Abram to Abraham and Sarai to Sarah. Up to this point, he had been known as Abram, but Jehovah renamed him Abraham, which means “Father of a Multitude.” And now, for the first time, Jehovah showed where Sarah fits into the picture. He changed her name from Sarai, which may have meant something like “contentious,” to Sarah, the name familiar to us all, princess.

Have you ever thought why they have just one name in scripture, a first name but no surname, as if there were not other Abraham’s and Sarah’s around to confuse the issue as to whom was being spoken of? We seldom consider the God speaks of His children as Joseph, David, Peter or Paul rather than their Christian name and surname, a first name and a second name, a given name and a father’s name. Bible characters have a first name and that generally suffices. Surnames are largely traditional and the laws on what you call yourself vary from country to country.

Under English law:

“a person may change their surname at will. The law concerns itself only with the question whether the individual has in fact assumed and has come to be known by a surname different from that by which they were originally known. So long as that is the case, the change of surname will be valid. The process is not subject to any documentary formalities although there is a facility for doing so through the UK courts by way of a Deed Poll or Statutory Declaration.

Forenames: As long as it is not done for fraudulent or other unlawful purposes, a person may assume any forename without any formalities and can identify themselves with, and be identified by, the assumed name. There is some uncertainty in English law as to whether a Christian (Baptismal) forename can be legally displaced. A determination of a person's legal forename can only be made by a UK Court. However an assumed forename used in place of the name given on baptism is still valid for the purposes of legal identification, if it is by this name that the individual has generally become known.

Marriage: Upon marriage, while it is traditional for the woman to take the man's surname, it is also perfectly acceptable for the woman to keep her maiden name or the couple to create their own "double-barrelled" or hyphenated surname by using both of their original surnames. Civil Partnerships also allow for each partner to keep their original surname, take their partner's or create their own double-barrelled or hyphenated surname by using both of their original surnames. The British Marriage Certificate states the surnames of the parties prior to their marriage and is supporting evidence of a request by either party to change their surname. No additional documentation is required under UK law.

Whatever the human reasons for names, there is a more important heavenly reason. The surname we are given is "Son of God".

*Isa 45:3 And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. Isa 45:4 For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: **I have surnamed thee**, though thou hast not known me.* This is brought home in the New Testament.

*Rev 3:12 Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and **I will write upon him the name of my God**, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and **I will write upon him my new name**.* Like Abraham, our names that we are given when born into sin, are changed by God, and so too are our surnames.

It is so late in the lives of Abraham and Sarah, that it would seem that they had little time to enjoy the providence of God, in offspring, so, did they lay up for their offsprings future? *Paul says, 2Co 12:14 Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not yours, but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children.* Well certainly the parents lay up for the children, but **what** and in **what circumstance**? Some parents indulge their children so much, that they even give them support when they have no love for the Lord.

What does the Bible say about parents leaving an inheritance for their children? Got Questions website says:

Inheritance was the gift of honour and support given by a patriarch to his sons (and sometimes daughters). It was meant for the provision and status of the family. Most of

the occurrences of inheritance in the first half of the Old Testament refer to God bestowing the Promised Land on the Israelites—the Heavenly Father providing for His sons and daughters. Because the land was given by God to the individual families, the people were not allowed to dispose of their land permanently. If they needed to sell it, it was to be returned during the year of Jubilee, *Lev 25:10 And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubile unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family.* (See Leviticus 25:23-38).

The Bible laid out specific guidelines for inheriting family property: the eldest son was to inherit a double portion (Deuteronomy 21:15-17); if there were no sons, daughters were allowed to inherit their father's land (Numbers 27:8); in the absence of direct heirs, a favoured servant or a more distant kinsman could inherit the land (Genesis 15:2; Numbers 27:9-11). At no time could the land pass to another tribe. The point of passing on the land was to ensure the extended family had a means of support and survival. Inheritance was assumed, and only Proverbs speaks of it as a particular virtue, *Pro 13:22 A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just.*

The New Testament writings do not speak of a physical inheritance but rather a spiritual inheritance. In fact, in Luke: *Luk 12:19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. Luk 12:20 But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? Luk 12:21 So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.* (See Luke 12:13-21). Jesus downplays the importance of an earthly inheritance, explaining that it can lead to greed and an obsession with wealth. It is far better to store up treasures in heaven. Our inheritance, like the Israelites', is from God (Acts 20:32; Ephesians 1:11, 14, 18). And, like Abraham (Hebrews 11:8, 13), we will not receive our inheritance in this lifetime (1 Peter 1:4). What is this inheritance? Psalm 37:11 and Matthew 5:5 say it's the whole earth. James 2:5 says it's the kingdom of God, and Hebrews 11:16 calls it a heavenly country.

First Corinthians 2:9 says it is so wonderful, that "eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him." And Revelation 21 describes a new heaven and new earth where God will dwell among His people and take away tears, mourning, pain, and death.

As believers, we are not bound to the Old Testament Law. Instead, we are to follow the two greatest commandments—love God and love others (Matthew 22:34-36). The Old Testament offers practical examples as to how to fulfil the greatest commandments. In regards to inheritance, it's the example of parents ensuring their family is cared for after their death. In modern times, this doesn't necessarily mean land, or even material possessions. It can include imparting a good character, ensuring children have an education, or training them in a profession.

But, when most people think of parents leaving an inheritance for their children, it is in regards to material possessions. The Bible definitely supports the idea of parents leaving their material possessions/wealth/property to their children (**sic!**). At the same time, parents should not feel obligated to save up everything for their children's inheritance, neglecting themselves in the process. It should never be a matter of guilt or obligation. Rather, it should be an act of love, a final way of expressing your love and appreciation to children. Most important, however, is the parents' responsibility to make sure children are aware of the inheritance they will receive if they follow Christ. Parents are to teach their children about God's expectations (Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Ephesians 6:4) and bring their children to Christ (Mark 10:14). In this way, parents can provide for their children in the greatest way possible.

I disagree with the open statement, "The Bible definitely supports the idea of parents leaving their material possessions/wealth/property to their children" and I will show why.

The prodigal son asked for his inheritance while the father was alive, *Luk 15:11 And he said, A certain man had two sons: Luk 15:12 And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.* There are some points to make in this story. The Father could give the inheritance to his sons in life if he wanted to, since it would eventually fall to them. **This is done under the law and the inheritance of the land of Israel was typical of the inheritance of Heaven.** The land passed down the generations, from father to son.

Could they do what they wanted with an inheritance? No, they could not, it was governed by strict rules laid down by God and reverted to original ownership at the Jubilee. This reminded them that God, not the Nation of Israel owned the land of Israel, *Lev 25:10 And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubile unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family. Lev 25:11 A jubile shall that fiftieth year be unto you: ye shall not sow, neither reap that which groweth of itself in it, nor gather the grapes in it of thy vine undressed. Lev 25:12 For it is the jubile; it shall be holy unto you: ye shall eat the increase thereof out of the field. Lev 25:13 In the year of this jubile ye shall return every man unto his possession. Lev 25:14 And if thou sell ought unto thy neighbour, or buyest ought of thy neighbour's hand, ye shall not oppress one another: Lev 25:15 According to the number of years after the jubile, thou shalt buy of thy neighbour, and according unto the number of years of the fruits he shall sell unto thee: Lev 25:16 According to the multitude of years thou shalt increase the price thereof, and according to the fewness of years thou shalt diminish the price of it: for according to the number of the years of the fruits doth he sell unto thee.*

The inheritance given to the prodigal son and its usage, was by this made even more grievous. The son had shown complete disregard for the sons that would come, leaving the future empty. He trivialised the inheritance, consumed it on his own lust and he despised God the giver of all things. This is shown when he finally gets his mind back and confesses his fault, *Luk 15:18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, Luk 15:19 And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.* He acknowledges that he was wrong.

Which raises the question, can our offspring demand their inheritance? We are not under the obligation of the prodigal's father, we do not have the obligation of law, but we do have the obligation to Christ. And this is the question, **"Do we really leave everything to those not in Christ?"**

In a day when we take inheritances for granted in the western world at least, we seldom give a thought for the character of the person receiving the inheritance. But if you are a Christian that is important, and you could leave an inheritance to an absolute profligate who will ruin themselves further if they have an inheritance.

So what do we do with the inheritance, if any and to whom do we leave it? We should adopt a New Testament Biblical perspective that does not reward profligacy and unbelief. Charity was shown to worthy poor people, not slobs who idly predated the hard working.

1Ti 5:8 But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel. 1Ti 5:9 Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, 1Ti 5:10 Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work. 1Ti 5:11 But the younger widows refuse: for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry; 1Ti 5:12 Having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith.

2Th 3:10 For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. 2Th 3:11 For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. 2Th 3:12 Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. 2Th 3:13 But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing.

As death approaches you, it will be your last act of stewardship. It will be the last time you can serve God with the things He has given you. Will you turn against Him by funding an unbeliever on their way to hell or will you think and leave God's money to a godly cause?

Abraham did not treat his sons the same, but gave all he had to Isaac, *Gen 25:5 And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac. Gen 25:6 But unto the sons of the concubines, which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, unto the east country.* He put a difference between them.

I think that is a hint for us.

35. Strangers

The next chapter of Abraham's life sees him camped in the Plains of Mamre, which you recall was part of the land of the Amorite, *Gen 14:12 And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed. Gen 14:13 And there came one that had escaped, and told Abram the Hebrew; for he dwelt in the plain of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol, and brother of Aner: and these were confederate with Abram.*

Three mysterious figures suddenly appear by his tent and he runs to meet them, yes he ran, at 99 years old, because this was a manifestation of God and he would honour the men. Who were the three men? It appears to be “God”, Jehovah, speaking to Abraham, but three men are present. *Gen 18:1 And **the LORD** appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; Gen 18:2 And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, **three men stood by him**: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground.*

Two of the “men” are called angels. *Gen 19:1 And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground;*

Now are all three “men” angels or are only two of them angels with God playing the role of the third? It is not clear, though in a general sense they are all messengers, or angels, for so the terms means. They bear an uncanny resemblance to the three angels of Revelation, *Rev 8:13 And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!* This is their message:

*Rev 14:6 And I saw **another angel** fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Rev 14:7 Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; **for the hour of his judgment is come**: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters. Rev 14:8 And there followed **another angel**, saying, **Babylon is fallen**, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication. Rev 14:9 And **the third angel** followed them, saying with a loud voice, **If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand**, Rev 14:10 The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented **with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels**, and in the presence of the Lamb: Rev 14:11 And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.*

In Revelation, it is the message of judgement, the fall of Babylon and the destruction of the wicked that have the mark of the beast. The men who visited Abraham, had just stopped by to give him the news of his son’s coming birth, but their purpose was to destroy Sodom. They had come to send them up in flames, *Gen 19:24 Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah **brimstone and fire** from the LORD out of heaven*; This is a precursor of the judgement on the World as a whole, and it comes with the announcement of the birth of a son to Abraham.

I think this story of Abraham, is looking forward to the work of Christ, *Joh 12:31 Now is the judgment of this world: now **shall the prince of this world be cast out**. Joh 12:32 And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. Joh 12:33 This he said, signifying what death he should die.* The birth of the Son of God is also the death knell of satan and his evil demons. I think that it is for this reason that the birth of Isaac and the fall of Sodom and Gomorrah are linked so closely in scripture.

Despite his great age he is not forgetful to entertain these strangers, *Heb 13:2 Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.* This may have been the

origin of this verse. He gives them that hospitality for which the dwellers in tents were made famous.

Suddenly he must put himself out for his guests and he does so magnificently. He washes their feet as an example of his humility, *Joh 13:14 If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. Joh 13:15 For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.* It is not common today, but in those times, when travellers rested their sweaty bodies and dirty feet, they must have felt the luxury of this service. And accordingly he bids them rest in the shade of a tree, while he and Sarah prepare a feast for the men. He kills the fatted calf for the men and stands as a servant while they eat.

I observe how some Christians are mean in their giving to strangers. They give more to those people they like, to those that agree with them doctrinally, to those they can relate to, than others. Some are slow or neglectful to give and be generous, be kind to the stranger. It does not say fellow believer but **stranger**, a foreigner, someone who is not necessarily a believer.

God had a special place for strangers and it was to remind the Israelite not to get above himself for after all, they were strangers themselves, *Exo 22:21 Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. Exo 22:22 Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. Exo 22:23 If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; Exo 22:24 And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.*

We are quick enough to settle our needs, our wants asking God to, “please give me what I ask” but are neglectful of others, who we could help. Jesus tells us a story about this double standard, and the outcome of it.

Mat 18:23 Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. Mat 18:24 And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talent Mat 18:25 But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. Mat 18:26 The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Mat 18:27 Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. Mat 18:28 But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest..... Mat 18:33 Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?

When the servant requested compassion, his master was too willing to give it, but when the boot was on the other foot, the servant did not respond in the same way. What is good for one person is not good for another. Some Christians take with two hands and give with one hand or not at all. They ask but do not give.

But that is not all. We treat the unbeliever as if they were an alien race and one to which we had no relationship, we have become so holy. More than that, the new family of Christians, to which we

belong, is our new target of discrimination. Why do we bother to pray for Christians? We treat some of them worse than the heathen.

Have you seen how we do this evil? We judge certain Christians as unworthy and we change our churches like we change our underpants. We hop to another place of so called “worship”, thinking that we have gotten rid of the problem, but in fact we have taken it with us. The new congregation is tainted by our actions. Instead of standing up to the divisive issue and settling it between the warring factions, because we lack the guts to confront the person, we just walk out. So the sin, if there is one, is now no longer one between brothers or sisters, it becomes a sin of disobedience to Christ.

I have never seen any Christians work for reconciliation, rather they work towards division, by neglecting this scripture: *Mat 18:15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: **if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.** Mat 18:16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. Mat 18:17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.*

You would not think that we are a glorious body of Christ. Our aim is set on dividing the Church, denominating, setting up factions between those for whom the Lord died, in the hope of obtaining religious purity. But Paul says: *1Co 1:10 Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.* It is the mark of carnality, the fleshly man, that does this, *1Co 3:3 For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? 1Co 3:4 For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?*

The Jews, that is the ancient Israelites, although from different families and different tribes, and some different nations, all held together as one body. Why cannot we do the same? Why did they have just one religion? Why did they initially not divide into factions, orthodox, liberal, or some other distinctive group, still carrying the ghost of Judaism?

I think that there was **one distinctive** that marked the people of Israel initially, and that was the fear of God coupled with obedience to His word. As long as that was there, wherever the people were, in whatever country, they were of a unified faith. This is seen in Solomon’s dedication of the Temple, *1Ki 8:28 Yet have thou respect unto the prayer of thy servant, and to his supplication, O LORD my God, to hearken unto the cry and to the prayer, which thy servant prayeth before thee to day: 1Ki 8:29 That thine eyes may be open toward this house night and day, even toward the place of which thou hast said, My name shall be there: that thou mayest hearken unto the prayer which thy servant shall make toward this place. 1Ki 8:30 And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant, and of thy people Israel, **when they shall pray toward this place: and hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place: and when thou hearest, forgive.***

It is saying, that when an Israelite remembered his duty to God, when he looked towards the Temple at Jerusalem, although he was many miles from it, even in exile, he was connecting with the God of

heaven, “**when they shall pray toward this place: and hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place: and when thou hearest, forgive**”. The sins committed were sent, via the Covenant home in Jerusalem, to be forgiven by God in Heaven. It was like a telephone exchange that sent messages to Heaven only by that one exchange in Jerusalem. Any other number that a person, as it were, dialled, using a different exchange, to get through to God failed. There was one way of repentance and only one.

That means, if they were genuinely repentant, they would look towards Jerusalem. They would have a true heart of repentance, because they sincerely wanted forgiveness on God’s terms. It was a renewal of the Covenant, although many miles from the seat of the Covenant. It was an affirmation of the original faith, the true faith of Israel.

Over the years many ceased to hold the true faith in Israel and by Jesus day, they were mired in their tradition of the elders, the commandments of men and their own tradition, *Mar 7:5 Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the **tradition of the elders**, but eat bread with unwashen hands? Mar 7:6 He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Mar 7:7 Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines **the commandments of men**. Mar 7:8 For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. Mar 7:9 And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your **own tradition***. The true faith had evaporated leaving a residue of sin.

In New Testament times the faith started well but in time fell away, leaving the door to invention open. Man’s tradition, man’s commandments and the tradition’s of the elders, began to take hold again. I had two particular issues relevant to this come to light this week. One was a “reverend”, He said,

The "Reverend" that I use happens to be a ministerial rank in my church denomination. One normally begins serving as a "Minister", then if the person is seen faithful to the call, he is then inducted as a "Pastor" (sic!). After some years of faithful service, the "Pastor" is ordained as a "Reverend".

In my church, it is at the rank of a "Reverend" that you are officially mandated to officiate marriages, funeral etc. I *don't think the title "Reverend" is in the scriptures*, it is possibly one of the borrowed church traditions.

May God help us to overcome all those non Biblical church traditions.

You can see the traditions of men. Marriages and funerals, promotion from minister, to pastor, to reverend, “possibly one of the borrowed church traditions”. Yes they are all borrowed but not from Christ. He says, “May God help us to overcome all those non Biblical church traditions”, while still upholding them and being tied to that tree. He does not want to let go. What hope is there when they are so blind?

Another note was to Open Doors, who have become increasingly woke and non-Biblical. I wrote, “I am disappointed to read about the “secret believers” in the Opens doors magazine. I

cannot find any in my Bible so I do not know who these are". They are giving and giving in to people who are afraid to be known by their own names and the Name of Christ.

I have every sympathy with these people they are giving aid to and their circumstances, they are not my circumstances but I am sure it is not the Christian way to live. However we are told to reckon ourselves as dead, *Col 3:2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. Col 3:3 For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.* We may be killed but so what, we are dead anyhow.

This organisation, Open Doors, is mis-leading people and mis-guiding them. What it is saying is that it is alright to be a secret believer, instead of encouraging their boldness, *Mat 10:32 Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. Mat 10:33 But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.*

It is in tackling these issues that we show our concern for believers. We do not neglect to tell them of the error of their ways. We do not love them less for their errors, but try to correct them and strengthen them. If we show no concern, are silent, it is the church that suffers and fragmentation increases, *Heb 13:3 Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.*

Abraham is shown the Angels' purpose, and he does not shrug his shoulders and let it go. God having brought the matter to his attention, he intercedes for the believers, the righteous, in Sodom. He is concerned for them and will argue with God for their freedom.

36. Intercessor

We saw Abraham's love of strangers and how he went out of his way to show them hospitality before he sent them on their journey. We have discussed the attitude we should have for believers and that we should not be partisan in our treatment of them, but hold all of Christ's people in the same esteem, and encourage them and rebuke them in equal measure. We should not allow the denominations of sinful men to divide us.

This leads to the second part of the story, when Abraham's guests are leaving him, *Gen 18:17 And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; Gen 18:18 Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? Gen 18:19 For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him. Gen 18:20 And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and **because their sin is very grievous**; Gen 18:21 I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know.*

God was going to "go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it" and he lets Abraham in on His planned visit to these cities. I have a heading for this part of the

narrative in my Bible and it is not part of the original text, which reads, “Abraham intercedes for Sodom”. **No, he does not.** Abraham, by reason of God’s grace, is made privy to what He will do, but **he does not intercede for Sodom**, any more the Christ intercedes for the world.

The intercessory prayer of Abraham is in a sense a formality, *Mat 6:7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Mat 6:8 Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.* This begs the question, “if God knows your needs, why pray?” It is in part to see how much genuine concern you have over your prayer. Is it sincere, heartfelt, or is it just an idle whim, not really of great concern, insincere?

Abraham, in this instance wants nothing for himself. It is for others he intercedes, *Gen 18:23 And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Gen 18:24 Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? Gen 18:25 That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*

His argument is based upon the essential nature of God, “**Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?**” It is not based upon the love, the mercy, and the kindness of God but the justice of God. Abraham must have had some knowledge of the nature of God, having observed and communicated with Him for some 25 years. This is a maturing view of his Maker, and he is saying, “Well, you are a righteous God, you judge in righteousness, how can you possibly kill the righteous with the wicked? They do not deserve the same punishment.”

This is an interesting approach to prayer. I wonder how many of us Christians use the “essential nature of God” in an argument before Him? I certainly do not, and I am convicted that I should. As well as asking Him what I should pray for, I should be thinking of His nature, and that He will never deny Himself, *2Ti 2:13 If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.* That certainly channels my prayer, because He will not answer some requests, because they run contrary to His nature and purpose.

Abraham’s prayer is importunate, but it is with the merit that it is repeating the nature of God. It is taking the Lord through, step by step, His concern for the righteous. Not just the righteous, as a body of people, but going down to the individual righteous person. But note, **he is praying for the righteous** not the unrighteous, *Joh 17:9 I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.*

His prayer does not go on for days, in fact it would be better called a conversation with God rather than a one way directive. He is importunate but not talkative. He does not wear the stone down by a continual dripping upon it, going on for days and weeks about the same subject. He is concise and having made the case rests, because God has answered him. The whole conversation lasts less than five minutes and by its recording in the Bible, the question does not have to be asked again by any generation. It is a principle and an unchangeable attribute of God.

Do you think that you can pray for the unrighteous? What did Jesus do? *Joh 17:9 I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. Joh 17:10 And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them....Joh 17:14 I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Joh 17:15 I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. Joh 17:16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.*

Jesus is praying according to the will of God. God does not save the unrighteous and so He does not pray for them. We should understand this too. But wait a minute, are not we told to pray for “all men”? *Ti 2:1 I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; 1Ti 2:2 For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. 1Ti 2:3 For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; 1Ti 2:4 Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.*

You know those indeterminate prayers, those blanket prayers, that people pray? They say them in such a sincere way, but they are candyfloss prayers, and one puff of wind and they are gone, and you are looking at what was really said, and it was nothing. They say “I pray for all men” and leave out what it is they prayed for. Not brother Paul, he says what he is praying for, “**that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.** For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour”. In praying for “all men” he is asking that they may be benevolent to all Christians.

But did not Peter say, *2Pe 3:8 But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 2Pe 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.* Who is he referring to when he says, “not willing that any should perish”? If he is talking to unbelievers, why does he call them “beloved”? Why does he say the God is longsuffering to “us”? Because this refers to the believer and not the unbeliever.

So Abraham does not pray for the unbeliever, because that would be a violation of the decree of God to reprobate some men, *1Pe 2:7 Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, 1Pe 2:8 And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.*

God clearly reprobates some because of their behaviour, *Rom 1:26 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: Rom 1:27 And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. Rom 1:28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;* If we should pray for those whom God has condemned, we are praying contrary to the will of God.

Abraham's approach to God is bold but humble, *Gen 18:27 And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes:Gen 18:30 And he said unto him, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Peradventure there shall thirty be found there. And he said, I will not do it, if I find thirty there.....Gen 18:32 And he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake.* He does not overstep the mark when speaking to his Lord.

He is drilling down in his argument, splitting it apart, going from a large number to a smaller number, to test his view about God. He goes from a large number of righteous to a small number of righteous, to test his hypothesis. If God will not destroy the city because 50 righteous are there will He destroy it if 10 righteous are there? No He will not, and by this Abraham proves something wonderful. The justice of God is based upon the righteous of God not the number of men in the city, not the size of the crowd, as if it were more important.

If you are righteous, that is justified by Christ, and have peace with God: *Rom 5:1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:* you have his assurance also that you will not be destroyed with the wicked.

It might be said along with Hagar's words, *Gen 16:13 And she called the name of the LORD that spake unto her, **Thou God seest me:** for she said, Have I also here looked after him that seeth me? I am not lost on God even though the crowds throng me, Mar 5:31 And his disciples said unto him, **Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?** Mar 5:32 And he looked round about to see her that had done this thing. Mar 5:33 But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth. Mar 5:34 And he said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague.*

Looking over history, you will wonder if this can be true. Does God really save the righteous from the unrighteous? With so many genocides it seems as if God is sleeping? There is the Holocaust and Polish Jews death toll, the Armenian genocide, the Cambodian genocide, the Rwandan genocide, the Bangladesh genocide, the Hutu Genocide in the Congo, the Uganda genocide, the East Timor genocide, the Rohingya genocide all relatively recent and the tip of the iceberg. Millions of souls condemned to an eternity of darkness.

There among the millions of dead, go good men, humanitarians, people who have devoted their lives to the poor, who have sacrificed their lives for others, who have used science for the greater benefit of mankind, minds of great genius using their intellect to explore the world and the universe for peace. Men and women who have given us a better quality of life, a longer life and one less wracked by disease. Good people, I agree, but one thing was missing from their lives, and that was the Lord Jesus Christ. For whatever they did, they did in their own name not His, and not for the glory of God, *1Co 10:31 Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*

Good is not righteous, and though a man be called by other men, "righteous among the nations", it is God alone who determines righteousness and who alone bestows it. Are all of these "good" people wicked people? Yes, in God's sight they are, because they have committed the ultimate crime

against God, they have rejected His Son, *Joh 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Joh 3:17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. Joh 3:18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*

Is this the goodness of God, condemning the majority of His people to damnation? I look to Abraham's first words on the issue, *Gen 18:24 Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the **fifty righteous** that are therein?* I estimated the size of this city at about 125,000 souls (see chapter on Abraham the Hunter), and God says that if 50 righteous persons were there, He would spare the city. Yet as we saw there were 4 righteous, and they were taken out of Sodom before it was destroyed.

Four out of 125,000 is not many, *Luk 13:23 Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Luk 13:24 Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.*

The dreadful thought must tumble down upon us, were these people, the majority of the people who perished in the wars, holocaust, plagues and famines, unrighteous? *Luk 13:1 There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. Luk 13:2 And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? Luk 13:3 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Luk 13:4 Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? Luk 13:5 I tell you, Nay: but, **except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.***

The frightening reality of this statement is, "**except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish**". We say that we are saved by grace and then go on to live a life of self-indulgent negligence. We spend the time in our little world, not in the Lords world clinging to the idea that we are "saved". Yet when we look at the majority of men we see that they perished with scarce a word of Christ on their lips.

What is the meaning of "repent"? It means to think differently, to reconsider. Reconsider what? That God will punish you for your sin and you must reconsider it? How should I reconsider it? Should I say sorry, should I reconsider everything I did? We would repent far more as we go on in the faith, and our repentance today is far greater than when we came to the Lord, at least it should be. And what if we have not repented sufficiently of our sins, then what? Are we saved?

We throw ourselves upon the mercy of God and say with the publican of old: *Luk 18:13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. Luk 18:14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.* We are sinners saved by the grace of God and should never for a moment forget it.

Abraham, in his importunate prayer, did not go on for a long time. He did not pray the same thing every day for years, not that I am saying you should not, but it was a prayer, a conversation with the Lord, that the Lord terminated. "Enough Abraham, you have made your point!" Abraham prayed for the Righteous just as Christ did. The rest of Mankind are lost souls.

37. My sister my spouse

I am passing over the story of Lot and the destruction of Sodom as it is important to follow our subject Abraham on his journey through life and we leave the life of Lot for now. We resume our study in Genesis chapter 20, *Gen 20:1 And Abraham journeyed from thence toward the south country, and dwelled between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar. Gen 20:2 And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah. Gen 20:3 But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife. Gen 20:4 But Abimelech had not come near her: and he said, Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation? Gen 20:5 Said he not unto me, She is my sister? and she, even she herself said, He is my brother: in the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands have I done this.*

This is the second time Abraham has called his wife, his sister, and Genesis recounts both events in some detail. Let me remind you of the first occasion, *Gen 12:10 And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land. Gen 12:11 And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon: Gen 12:12 Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive. Gen 12:13 Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee. Gen 12:14 And it came to pass, that, when Abram was come into Egypt, the Egyptians beheld the woman that she was very fair. Gen 12:15 The princes also of Pharaoh saw her, and commended her before Pharaoh: and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. Gen 12:16 And he entreated Abram well for her sake: and he had sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she asses, and camels. Gen 12:17 And the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram's wife. Gen 12:18 And Pharaoh called Abram, and said, What is this that thou hast done unto me? why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife? Gen 12:19 Why saidst thou, She is my sister? so I might have taken her to me to wife: now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way. Gen 12:20 And Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him: and they sent him away, and his wife, and all that he had.*

They are two identical events that men interpret as Abraham's fear for his life and consequent duplicity in trying to hide the real relationship. Yet God was with him on both occasions to deliver him, *Gen 12:17 And the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram's wife.....Gen 20:3 But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife.* If Abraham was being deceitful, if he only gave half the truth, God was certainly backing his servant and not the kings.

I think that these stories are important, and as with Pharaoh's dream is given twice for emphasis, *Gen 41:32 And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.* We should therefore pause to consider it in more detail as I think it has a great bearing on the narrative and birth of Isaac.

Did Abraham understand what he was doing and what it meant? I do not think so but later it would have dawned on him. In a manner, he was prophesying just as Joseph had done. His actions were a prophecy. Do you remember the story? *Gen 37:5 And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it his brethren: and they hated him yet the more. Gen 37:6 And he said unto them, Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed: Gen 37:7 For, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf. Gen 37:8 And his brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words.*

Joseph may have seemed unwise to utter the words that eventually brought him down to Egypt as a slave, but all things work together for good and as we see, all is well that ends well, *Gen 50:20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.*

It is not clear that Joseph understood the dream at the time but he did later when his brethren fell before him, *Gen 45:7 And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. Gen 45:8 So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.* God had made Joseph's sheaf of wheat greater than all of theirs and they bowed before him, just as we bow before the Christ.

Joseph was enacting in his life a parable, he was living something of the Christ, to stamp Christ's authority on history. They are not just good stories they are stories with purpose, telling us about Christ's glory. The event in Abraham's life is also a parable, telling of Christ's relationship with the Church, the sister, the spouse, and it tells us more of Christ who was to come. It is as if Abraham and Sarah have in them a compulsion to live a parable in their lives, not knowing why, they do it, *1Pe 1:10 Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: 1Pe 1:11 Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. 1Pe 1:12 Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.*

This puts a different spin on the two stories. What now is the scripture teaching us? To answer this question I want to look at the "Song which is Solomon's". I think that there is a parallel between Genesis and Song of Songs. I shall only give short summary of the book, and give my opinion that Christian Ginsburg, the 19th century commentator, is right in his explanation. The book by Ginsburg is available at the web address, <https://archive.org/details/songofsongs00gins> Here is a summary,

In the early nineteenth century Ewald, a German critical scholar, popularized the view that the key to understanding the Song was to recognize three main characters in the book: Solomon, a Shulammite maiden, and a common shepherd. Ewald said the Shulammite maiden was in love with her shepherd companion, and tension in the book stems from Solomon's attempt to take her for himself. Ewald "suggested that the king had carried off the maiden by force to his harîm, but that when she resisted his advances he permitted her to return to the locale of her rustic lover."

Jacobi suggested that the purpose of the Song was to celebrate the fidelity of true love and that the Shulammite maiden is the heroine of the book for remaining true to her humble shepherd husband. Pope explains the position of Jacobi: "King Solomon was smitten with her beauty and tried to persuade her to forsake her husband and enter the royal harem, tempting her with all the luxuries and splendours of his court. She, however, resisted every temptation and remained true to her humble husband."

One of the most noteworthy commentaries on the Song of Songs from the nineteenth century was written by Christian D. Ginsburg. Strongly influenced by Jacobi, Ginsburg concluded, "Thus this Song records the real history of a humble but virtuous woman, who, after having been espoused to a man of like humble circumstances, had been tempted in a most alluring manner to abandon him, and to transfer her affections to one of the wisest, and richest of men, but who successfully resisted all temptations, remained faithful to her espousals, and was ultimately rewarded for her virtue".

One of the difficulties of this view is in seeking to determine when the bride is addressing Solomon and when she is addressing her shepherd-lover.

This song introduces a motif which we see in Genesis. It is the motif of the king, the sister/spouse and the shepherd. In Genesis it is the king, Pharaoh/Abimelech, Sarah the sister/spouse and Abraham the shepherd.

Abraham and Sarah are unwittingly enacting these roles that God has ultimately given to Christ and the Church. The Church is the sister of Christ, for the Church and Christ have the same Father, just as Abraham and Sarah have the same father, *Gen 20:12 And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife*. One might say Adam and Eve were also brother and sister, having the same Father.

We seldom if ever think of the sisterly relationship of the Church to Christ, but it is there, and we who believe are the sons of God, *Rom 8:14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God*.

But I hear you ask, who is the king? Who is this third party and what does he represent? What does Ginsburg say,

"Thus this Song records the real history of a humble but virtuous woman, who, after having been espoused to a man of like humble circumstances, had been tempted in a most alluring manner to abandon him, and to transfer her affections to one of the

wisest, and richest of men, but who successfully resisted all temptations, remained faithful to her espousals, and was ultimately rewarded for her virtue”.

We must ask who or what tempts this virtuous woman, the Church from her Shepherd? It is the world which is ever a cause of temptation, *1Jn 2:15 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 1Jn 2:16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. 1Jn 2:17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.*

The “world” is given shape in the Kings of the Earth, who give themselves to the whore of Babylon, *Rev 17:15 And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues. Rev 17:16 And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. Rev 17:17 For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled. Rev 17:18 And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.*

Babylon is all that the world aspires to, all that she considers important, all that the kings give themselves to, *Rev 18:3 For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. Rev 18:4 And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.*

The sister/spouse/church must be delivered from the grip of this temptation. Solomon, you think was a good and a wise king, and perhaps he was to start with, but not later on. Do you think this sounds like a godly king or an apostate king? *1Ki 11:3 And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart. 1Ki 11:4 For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and **his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father.** 1Ki 11:5 For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. 1Ki 11:6 And **Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD**, and went not fully after the LORD, as did David his father. 1Ki 11:7 Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon. 1Ki 11:8 And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods.*

Does this sound like a good king, Solomon, a man whose “**heart was not perfect with the LORD his God**” a man who “**did evil in the sight of the LORD**”. No wonder the Shullamite resisted his advances and turned to her lover the shepherd. No wonder God plagued Pharaoh’s house and Abimelech’s house, because they had tried to take the Shepherds bride, and although it was not clear to Abraham, why he did what he did, the “type” was clear later on.

Solomon is an enigma, for he starts as one thing and ends up as another. He reminds me of Lucifer, or Babylon, from the context of Isaiah, *Isa 14:11 Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee. Isa 14:12 How art thou*

fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! Isa 14:13 For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: Isa 14:14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Isa 14:15 Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.

Solomon starts humbly, but then he exalts his throne, and becomes like Lucifer. This is not so far fetched as it may seem. He starts a saint and becomes a devil, *Rev 13:18 Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.* The number 666 is associated with Solomon's income. *2Ch 9:13 Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred and threescore and six talents of gold;*

He did all of the things a king was NOT suppose to do, *Deu 17:15 Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the LORD thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother. Deu 17:16 But **he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the LORD hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way. Deu 17:17 Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold. Deu 17:18 And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites:***

It also happens he is the 666th name in the Bible. <http://newworlds.50webs.com/letter10.html> . Like Adonikam, the number is associated with him, *Ezr 2:13 The children of Adonikam, six hundred sixty and six.* Adonikam is mentioned without comment along with the many others whose descendants are enumerated in Ezra's chronicle. Of Adonikam we know little, but he could have been (from the identity of the associated names) the Adonijah who joined in the religious covenant of Nehemiah (Neh 10: 16). Adonikam means the Lord of the enemy and it is this association with 666 that makes the reference engaging. Nonetheless, as E. W. Bullinger says, this is suggestive, even though it may be vague. But the name could also mean whom the Lord sets up.

Interestingly, the number 666 is written in the Greek text **Χξς**, by three letters of the Greek alphabet. The Romans wrote in letters also, not in the Arabic numeral system that we use. Those three letter of the Greek have by a strange coincidence the first and last letters of the name Christ, **Χριστός**, with the serpent in between them. The serpent is shrouded by Christ, the ultimate deception, the devil hidden by the form of Christ, *2Co 11:14 And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. 2Co 11:15 Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.* Like father like son.

We cannot condemn Abraham for his behaviour before the kings. He was enacting something very important, something more than his own life, he was enacting Christ and the Church, and their victory over the evil one.

38. Laughter

*Gen 21:1 And the LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken. Gen 21:2 For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. Gen 21:3 And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac. Gen 21:4 And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being eight days old, as God had commanded him. Gen 21:5 And Abraham was an hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him. Gen 21:6 And **Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me.***

And Sarah said, “God hath made me to laugh”. The former laughter of despair gave way; but now, God having given her a son and laid a foundation for laughter of another kind, for real, solid, joy.

Is this an excuse for continual laughter or should we be continually sombre? Should a Christian joke and fool about all the time? Should a Christian use humour in their sermons, should they go about making inappropriate jokes, should they even laugh out loud, or should they go about looking like they have just sucked an unripe lemon?

It must depend upon the circumstances of the humour. The following was transcribed from a portion of a message attributed to Dr. Peter Marshall, in 1942. It is one of the most moving sermons I have ever heard. It contrasts two similar events, in which one event trivialises and with a dark humour, is singing in the dark. The other event shows the great urgency and sobriety of the situation.

At the beginning of the war there were two notable examples. You may remember the foundering of the Athenia, and the loss of the City of Benares off the west coast of Africa. And at that time one of the popular songs was as you may remember, “the beer-barrel polka”. And we read (incredible as it seems), we read of survivors struggling in the water, crouched, wet and shivering in life-boats singing together, “roll out the barrel and we’ll have a barrel of fun”. One might be aghast at the prospect of facing eternity to the strains of the beer-barrel polka but there is nevertheless something thrilling about the spirit that can sing at such a time, even although what they sing seems inane and strangely inappropriate.

I have often thought, what a startling contrast to another maritime disaster, which some of you will remember, in May 1912, when the Titanic went down. I was a very little boy then but I can well remember the special editions of the papers and the magazines with their heavy black borders describing the loss of this magnificent new ship, which men said could never sink. This floating palace was in collision with a floating mountain of ice and icy knives ripped open a hull that was claimed to be unsinkable.

And when the orchestra which a few minutes before had been playing Strauss waltzes in the ballroom, gathered on the boat-deck, and when the male passengers stood alongside to the cry, “women and children first”, loading lifeboats, as many as could be lowered away, they waited patiently, hoping that there might be a chance of rescue and then, when it appeared that none was likely, the orchestra began to play, and they began to

sing, but what did they sing! They sang, “nearer my God to Thee, nearer to Thee, even though it be a cross that raiseth me, yet all my song shall be nearer my God to Thee, nearer to Thee, nearer to Thee.”

Now when you contrast that, with, “roll out the barrel and we’ll have a barrel of fun”, you can see what has happened to a nation’s faith, you can see what has happened to the faith of people in thirty years, can’t you? Facing eternity, to the strains of the beer-barrel polka, what a commentary, upon the faith, of immortal souls.

Few people knew of his sense of humour. In the pulpit, To Martyn Lloyd Jones, the issues of salvation were so serious that he refused to make jokes. However, outside the pulpit, he had an enormous and infectious sense of humour, which those in his circle and in his family appreciated greatly. He and his brothers were expert punsters! This is an important trait of his that most biographies omit, but which was very central to the kind of human that he was. He said, “the man who tries to be humorous is an abomination and should never be allowed to enter the pulpit.”

Pastor Bob O'Bannon wrote of an event he had partaken in:

If you asked me to think of a word to describe John Piper, I think one of the last to come to mind would be “hilarious.” And yet at a conference for the American Association of Christian Counsellors back in 2009, that’s exactly how he was perceived to be.

Forgive me for commenting on this more than four years after the fact, but this just came to my attention recently, and it’s so utterly bizarre and unexplainable that I couldn’t resist writing about it. The video is about five minutes long, but it’s worth your time to watch here.

Here are some of the highlights: Piper says he feels vulnerable and exposed to speak to this particular group. He says he senses that this group, being counsellors, could see straight through him, and the audience laughs. Piper declares himself to be a sinner, and the audience laughs. Piper lists a number of his own weaknesses and besetting sins, including the instinct to blame his sins on someone else, and the audience laughs.

After much patience, Piper finally admits that he finds the audience “very strange,” that he was not expecting laughter, that he is “continually perplexed “at their reaction to his comments . . . and the audience laughs again.

But even more unusual is when a man of Piper’s reputation (a serious and weighty proclaimer of God’s word) stands before this particular audience (a group of Christians) and presents himself with even more vulnerability than normal (admitting to problems in his marriage and his own temptation toward self-pity), and is met with repeated guffaws and cackles.

The only explanation I can think of is that we happen to live in a culture in which people expect that they must always be entertained. We are conditioned to immediately assume that speakers must always try to be funny. The fact that the Piper incident

happened among a gathering of Christian counsellors suggests that this expectation is apparently even cultivated in our churches.

In my opinion, there are appropriate places for humour in a sermon or worship service, but I don't think the Israelites were giggling when they approached God on Mount Sinai in Exodus chapter 19; I don't think the Old Testament prophets opened their calls to repentance with jokes; I don't think Peter or Paul or Stephen were looking for laughs in the sermons that are recorded for us in the book of Acts. And I'm quite sure John Piper wasn't looking for laughs when he spoke to that group of Christian counsellors. So, can someone tell me – why were those people laughing at John Piper?

Larry Michael writes of C H Spurgeon:

Spurgeon considered humour such an integral part of his ministry that a whole chapter in his autobiography is devoted to it. Humour permeates his sermons and writings, often woven into the fabric of his messages. It's one reason among many why he is still so readable today.

Spurgeon knew the blessing of the treatment of humour. He often spoke of his illness in humorous terms: "I have had sharp pains," he wrote to a friend, "but I am recovering. Only my back is broken, and I need a new vertebrae." Once, when he was feeling depressed, he spoke of the remedy of laughter:

The other evening I was riding home after a heavy day's work. I felt wearied and sore depressed, when swiftly and suddenly that text came to me, 'My grace is sufficient for thee.' I reached home and looked it up in the original, and at last it came to me in this way. 'My grace is sufficient for THEE.' And I said, 'I should think it is, Lord,' and I burst out laughing. I never understood what the holy laughter of Abraham was till then. It seemed to make unbelief so absurd...O brethren, be great believers. Little faith will bring your souls to heaven, but great faith will bring heaven to your souls.

Some of Spurgeon's humour even bordered on the cynical — like the time he was embroiled in the Baptismal Regeneration Controversy. When Spurgeon took on the Church of England clerics because of their belief in baptismal regeneration, he had a baptismal font installed in his back garden as a birdbath. He referred to it as "the spoils of war." While the great "Prince of Preachers" may have gone over the top on that one, for the most part, his humour was balanced and appropriate.

Spurgeon knew the value of laughter and humour. Both in tough times and sick times, humour was a means for him to deal with his situation. It was a coping mechanism for him. There will always be seasons of sadness and joy for the conscientious leader. But, the leader who learns to balance the two, will learn the discipline of employing laughter and joy in his life. It could very well make a difference in his fulfilment and purpose in his service to the Lord.

Sarah first laughed a cynical laugh, a despairing sigh, *Gen 18:12 Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?* And Abraham did also, *Gen 17:17 Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?* This response came to a sober truth, not given in jest by their Creator. He was not joking, but they, from their ignorant position saw the irony in the statement. This was not the laughter of joy, but of despair.

It is like the laughter of those who respond to a message of hope with scorn, *Mar 5:38 And he cometh to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and seeth the tumult, and them that wept and wailed greatly. Mar 5:39 And when he was come in, he saith unto them, Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth. Mar 5:40 And **they laughed him to scorn.** But when he had put them all out, he taketh the father and the mother of the damsel, and them that were with him, and entereth in where the damsel was lying.*

This is not the laughter we normally think of. When we talk of laughter, we generally think of a mirth that looks at the ridiculous, the foolish, the stupid things that happen to men, *Ecc 7:3 Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. Ecc 7:4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. Ecc 7:5 It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools. Ecc 7:6 For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity.* It is the trivial pursuit of men, it is like those hopeless fools singing “the beer barrel polka” as they drifted into the sea of eternity.

He writes of the vain laughter of fools, “*For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool*”. Cynicism, scorn, foolishness are all causes of laughter, but there is a laughter that is above this, and this is the laughter which comes from God. It is the pure joy, the unfettered happiness, unspeakable though it may be, it is manifest in a smile, it is spoken in the universal language of laughter, it is the Holy laughter of the saint, *1Pe 1:8 Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:*

This joy is the cause of laughter for Christians. When he sees the Lord’s work he is joyful, *Job 38:4 Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Job 38:5 Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Job 38:6 Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof; Job 38:7 When the morning stars sang together, and **all the sons of God shouted for joy?***

Do you not look upon the works of God with wonder and joy? How the smallest of creatures, such as the ant is an example for man, *Pro 6:6 Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Pro 6:7 Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Pro 6:8 Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.* It is an amazing, wondrous thing, that such a small creature has such a capacity for organised work that they are a lesson for men. Truly God is a God of wonders, yet men laugh the laughter of fools, scorning His creation rather than laughing the joy of the Lord.

Sarah had this joy of the Lord, *Gen 21:6 And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me. Gen 21:7 And she said, Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given children suck? for I have born him a son in his old age.* Her laughter was the expression of her soul, her relief, that her barrenness was past and what made this such a joyous occasion, was that in her later years when all human hope had ceased, God delivered her a son, whose name was laughter, Isaac.

When Spurgeon, in the grip of despair recalled the words, “My grace is sufficient for thee.” He said, I reached home and looked it up in the original, and at last it came to me in this way. ‘My grace is sufficient for **THEE**.’ And I said, ‘I should think it is, Lord,’ and I burst out laughing.

Coming to the end of self and relying totally upon the Lord is not a cause of despair and last resort. It should be **the first resort**, and we have the lesson to learn with Spurgeon and Sarah, and a whole host of other saints, that God will have us in this position of reliance upon Him, where He can work unencumbered by our struggles. If a Christian is in despair or downcast, it is wise to ask whether they are relying on self or if they have given all over to the Lord.

How different from those poor souls singing “the beer barrel polka”, singing in the dark as they went down in the dark waters, still relying on self.

39. Castaway

*Gen 21:8 And the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned. Gen 21:9 And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking. Gen 21:10 Wherefore she said unto Abraham, **Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac.** Gen 21:11 And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son. Gen 21:12 And God said unto Abraham, **Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called.***

It was of the Lord, to make Sarah cast out the slave and her son, so we must accept that it is a righteous act, not a cruel fabrication by Sarah in order to be rid of her rival. It was part of the divine plan to get rid of the servant, but why? To answer that we must go to the inspired words of Paul to the Galatians, although I do not think he is focussed on the event before us as he writes about the interpretation of our verse in Genesis, because has a bigger thought in his mind. I do not think that he sits in his chair thinking, “I must write to someone, who shall it be?”, “I must write to someone, what shall I write about?” He writes with purpose in order to guard the Church from creeping errors. Our verse is important to his thread of thinking but it is not the purpose of his writing.

There are some Christians who look at the Bible as a series of individual texts and a book of precise answers. Yet each book is written for a purpose and if we do not see that, we shall be using the

words out of the context in which they were given and possibly using them incorrectly and we are poorer for that. The text must be seen in context, for it was not written to just stand alone.

The book, or letter, for it is in that form, contains a reference to the passage which we are dealing with here in the Old Testament. The book of Galatians must be understood in its context of the New Testament times and why it was written. The words of Genesis chapter 21 are explained for us by Paul as he labours to make a particular point, and it is one of those jewels of illustration, among the many jewels that crown this letter.

Let us read the portion of the letter first. *Gal 4:28 Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. Gal 4:29 But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Gal 4:30 Nevertheless what saith the scripture? **Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. Gal 4:31 So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.***

This was one of the **first** letters written in the New Testament. If we did not have brother Luke's account (Acts of Apostles) we should not be able to fit Galatians in to its historical context, so it is with thanks to Luke we have some background. It is a letter sent to the Galatians, following a dispute over the practices of some of the gentile Christians who are being encouraged to adopt Jewish practices. Paul tells the Galatians that he had a similar dispute with the Apostle Peter when he came to Antioch (not Pisidian Antioch in Asia). Peter gave way to the Jewish Christians and dissembled from the Gentile Christians. He was wrong to do so, and corrected, the matter was resolved and there were no hard feelings.

Judging by the tone of Acts chapter 15, the Council of Jerusalem, Peter seems to have taken to heart what Paul was saying, and they were thus united in their stand against Judaizers, and gave out this proclamation: *Act 15:19 Wherefore my sentence is, **that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God:** Act 15:20 But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. Act 15:21 For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.*

Basically, if you are a Jew and want to observe those things, you do not have a right to impose them on the gentiles.

The date of the letter suggests that Paul wrote to the Galatians and had the dispute with Peter, before this event in Acts chapter 15, dating it around 49 AD, 20 or so years after Christ's resurrection. Remember that Paul has been working out his teaching for at least 17 years (end of

	Epistle	Possible dates of writing*	Possible dates of writing**	Possible dates of writing***
1	Galatians	AD 49-55	AD 49	AD 49
2	1 Thessalonians	AD 51-22	AD 51	AD 51
3	2 Thessalonians	AD 51-22	AD 52	AD 51
4	1 Corinthians	AD 55	AD 55	AD 56
5	2 Corinthians	AD 56	AD 56	AD 57
6	Romans	AD 57-58	AD 57-58	AD 57
7	Ephesians	AD 60-61	AD 62	AD 61
8	Philippians	AD 60-61	AD 62-63	AD 61
9	Colossians	AD 61	AD 62	AD 61
10	Philemon	AD 61	AD 62	AD 61
11	Titus	AD 62-67	AD 65-66	AD 64
12	1 Timothy	AD 63-66	AD 65	AD 64
13	2 Timothy	AD 67	AD 67	AD 66-67

Figure 21 Dating Galatians

Chapter 1 and beginning of Chapter 2 of Galatians) before going to see the whole church. (See the Chronological Bible that inserts Galatians at chapter 15 of Acts).

This letter is addressed by Paul and his colleagues to the **Churches** of Galatia, not Church of Galatia, *Gal 1:2 And all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia*. Who took charge of the delivery of the letter, who took charge of it when it got there, who read it to the different Churches? We do not know. The Churches must have treasured this letter and copied it as it went around. The copyist must have known Greek, and it would have been a labour of love to copy it and it would have taken time and resources to copy it accurately. Letters of this size were certainly not an everyday occurrence and not everyone could read. God certainly kept charge of this letter and it did not fall into the hands of Judaizers who would have destroyed it and we would have lost this treasure of Paul.

Teaching was by word of mouth in those days, and there was no New Testament in existence, probably not for many years, and very few had access to the Old Testament, but some must have had a copy of the Greek or Hebrew Old Testament in order to verify Paul's quotations from it. The Galatian church may have been composed of Jews of the dispersion and gentiles from Asia. Gradually the importance of this letter was seen by the whole of Christendom and it entered the Canon of scripture. One letter became millions of copies, quite something when you consider the lack of a printing press for at least 1,500 years and only hand written copies.

The letter is composed to "Foolish Galatians". They are foolish, because they allow themselves, like the Apostle Peter, to be "bewitched", to be tricked by strange powers and to follow Jewish practices. *Gal 3:1 O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?* It was the truth set before them that they could not see, and Paul will set this out clearly and logically before them.

Paul certainly takes for granted the familiarity of his hearers with Abraham. This suggests that he is writing to Jews as well as gentiles.

*Gal 3:5 He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Gal 3:6 Even as **Abraham** believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness Gal 3:7 Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of **Abraham** Gal 3:8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto **Abraham**, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. Gal 3:9 So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful **Abraham**.....Gal 3:13 Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: Gal 3:14 That the blessing of **Abraham** might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.....Gal 3:16 Now to **Abraham** and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. Gal 3:17 And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. Gal 3:18 For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to **Abraham** by promise.*

It is surprising that the apostle, in destroying the law as a means to achieve righteousness, should go back some 430 years to the time of Abraham, before the law was given and put Abraham at the centre of his argument. *Gal 3:11 But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.* Abraham believed God before the law and was declared righteous (Gal 3:6), that the faithful ones are children of Abraham (Gal 3:7), that the Gospel, yes the GOSPEL, was preached to Abraham (Gal 3:8), that these peculiar blessings on Abraham's seed come through Jesus Christ before the giving of the law (Gal 3:14), that the seed was not the descendants of Abraham but Christ alone (Gal 3:16), that the law 430 years afterwards does not make that promise to Christ invalid (Gal 3:17), and if the inheritance was by the law it is no more of promise but God gave it to Abraham by promise (Gal 3:18).

See how Paul puts Christ at the Centre of his argument. He does not put Moses, the prophets or Israel, to prominence in his arguments but he puts Christ there. I shall come to discuss the foolishness of putting Israel at the forefront, which is dispensationalism, instead of Christ at the forefront shortly. All of Paul's argument is centred on the person of Christ.

He moves on to show why the law was given. The law was a teacher, to bring them to Christ. I do not think that teaching the law is necessarily the preparation for a person becoming a Christian, that you have to teach the law and then Christ, for a person to become a Christian. Although, the knowledge of what is right and wrong is certainly needed. What he is saying is that the law of Moses was like the teacher bringing us to the time of Christ, *Gal 3:23 But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Gal 3:24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. Gal 3:25 But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.*

When Christ has come, the law is no longer a system to which we go for the knowledge of righteousness. The teacher has passed us on to the Master. And the outcome of that is, we, Jew and Gentile, are one in Christ. There is no distinction in ethnicity, gender, or status, *Gal 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. Gal 3:29 And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.* We are then, children of Abraham, his seed and heirs, if we are in Christ. If we make that claim, that we are children of God, we cannot make a difference between us, such as Jew and gentile, without denying the grace of God and the work of Christ.

Paul goes on to say: *Gal 4:1 That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; Gal 4:2 But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Gal 4:3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: Gal 4:4 But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, Gal 4:5 **To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. Gal 4:6 And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Gal 4:7 Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.***

He is saying that in that state of being under law, we were like children under a tutor. Under the elements of the world, like servants, we were ruled by the world, slaves to the useless rule of the

world, and so we did not have the fullness of the inheritance. But Christ, in the fullness of time, rescued us, He redeemed us from the law so that we could take our place as sons. Sons through Christ.

And knowing that, they were giving themselves to weak and beggarly elements, observing times and seasons, for what profit? None. And it is here Paul introduces another lesson from the life of Abraham, *Gal 4:21 Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?* And he gives the story of Sarah and Hagar as an illustration of those who are slaves and those who are free, those born according to the flesh and those born according to the promise, those in bondage and those free, those of Jerusalem on earth and those of Jerusalem in heaven.

He concludes: *Gal 4:29 But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Gal 4:30 Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. Gal 4:31 So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.*

This conclusion, that those who seek to persecute the children of the free, are the slaves of the system that the Galatians are perpetrating, **“even so it is now”**. They are the modern day “Hagars”, the people who would erase the past history of Abraham in favour of Judaism. And this is the history of the Church, laws and rules that are not founded in the truth of Christ. One of these truths not founded on Christ’s teaching, concerns the rebuilding of the whole system of Judaism, and flies in the face of the teaching of the letter to the Galatians.

I have taken this extract from the “Got questions” website:

Dispensational theology teaches that there are two distinct peoples of God: Israel and the Church. Dispensationalists believe that salvation has always been by grace through faith alone—in God in the Old Testament and specifically in God the Son in the New Testament. Dispensationalists hold that the Church has not replaced Israel in God’s program and that the Old Testament promises to Israel have not been transferred to the Church. Dispensationalism teaches that the promises God made to Israel in the Old Testament (for land, many descendants, and blessings) will be ultimately fulfilled in the 1000-year period spoken of in Revelation 20. Dispensationalists believe that, just as God is in this age focusing His attention on the Church, He will again in the future focus His attention on Israel (see Romans 9–11 and Daniel 9:24).

It also has this element as reported in the popular press:

Christian prophecies about the end of the world predict a Third Holy Temple will be built in Jerusalem in the end days. End of the world eschatology claims the Third Temple will rise before the Biblical apocalypse. Many Christian evangelists and preachers believe the Third Temple is also linked to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

According to Irvin Baxter of the End Time Ministries, the third Holy Temple will be rebuilt in the last seven years of the world’s existence. There’s no doubt about it. Jesus of Nazareth, the saviour of the world, is going to return. Pastor Paul a doomsday preacher,

said this will happen in the first three years of the end times and will be the “most visible sign” of the end times finally arriving.

Mr Baxter said: “As that cornerstone is laid on the Temple Mount, every network on Earth will be televising this incredible event.” And Rick Brinegar and Dave Robbins of the Endtime Ministries said: “The Bible prophesies, in many places, that a Third Temple will be built in the near future.

All of which contradicts the things Paul has taught, *Gal 2:18 For if I **build again** the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. Gal 2:19 For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.* The Old Testament has been superseded. *Rom 7:5 For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. Rom 7:6 But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.*

The earthly has passed, you are dead to sin but alive to Christ, you look for a heavenly kingdom and city whose builder and maker is God, you have cast out the bondwoman and her son, you are free, *Gal 4:26 But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.*

Those who look to the earth for prophetic fulfilment are still in bondage but we are free, *Gal 5:1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.*

40. Beersheba

*Gen 21:22 And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech and Phichol the chief captain of his host spake unto Abraham, saying, God is with thee in all that thou doest: Gen 21:23 Now therefore swear unto me here by God that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son: but according to the kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned. Gen 21:24 And Abraham said, I will swear. Gen 21:25 And Abraham reproved Abimelech because of a well of water, which Abimelech's servants had violently taken away. Gen 21:26 And Abimelech said, I wot not who hath done this thing: neither didst thou tell me, neither yet heard I of it, but to day. Gen 21:27 And **Abraham took sheep and oxen, and gave them unto Abimelech; and both of them made a covenant.** Gen 21:28 And Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves. Gen 21:29 And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What mean these seven ewe lambs which thou hast set by themselves? Gen 21:30 And he said, For these seven ewe lambs shalt thou take of my hand, that they may be a witness unto me, that I have digged this well. Gen 21:31 Wherefore he called that place Beersheba; because there they sware both of them. Gen 21:32 Thus they made a covenant at Beersheba: then Abimelech rose up, and Phichol the chief captain of his host, and they returned into the land of the Philistines. Gen 21:33 And Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the everlasting God. Gen 21:34 And Abraham sojourned in the Philistines' land many days.*

Let us look at this passage in context. There are two stories about Abimelech and Abraham, one concerns **the Sister/Wife** in Genesis chapter 20, and one concerning **the Covenant** in Genesis chapter 21. Between the stories by way of a parenthesis, is the birth of Isaac and the preservation of

Ishmael. If we look at the two passages of the dealings of Abimelech and Abraham together and leave out for now the birth of Isaac and the preservation of Ishmael, we shall get a better picture of what is happening.

The fear of God descends upon Abimelech after he attempts to take Sarah for a concubine. I do not think that Abraham is in fear of his life on this occasion, or that he is anyway inferior to Abimelech. If that were so, why would Abimelech want to make a covenant with an inferior? *Gen 21:22 And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech and Phichol the chief captain of his host spake unto Abraham, saying, God is with thee in all that thou doest: Gen 21:23 Now therefore swear unto me here by God that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son: but according to the kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned.* He views Abraham as a superior. I think it was the Lord directing Abraham, accomplishing something greater.

It is her brother, Abraham's ploy, that got Sarah into trouble and Abimelech is at pains to show her innocence. The Authorised Version makes out that Abraham is faultless and that Sarah is guilty, *Gen 20:16 And unto Sarah he said, Behold, I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver: behold, he is to thee a covering of the eyes, unto all that are with thee, and with all other: thus she was reproved.* But I do not think that Sarah was "reproved", and as the innocent party she is exonerated. The following alternative translations make it clearer.

Gen 20:16 And unto Sarah he said, Behold, I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver: behold, it is for thee a covering of the eyes to all that are with thee; and in respect of all thou art righted. ASV..... And he said to Sarah, See, I have given to your brother a thousand bits of silver so that your wrong may be put right; now your honour is clear in the eyes of all. BBE.....Then he said to Sarah, "I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver as proof to everyone that you have done nothing wrong." CEV.

Abraham, as we saw, employed the sister/wife strategy twice, once with the Egyptians and here, with the Philistines. Abimelech is a Philistine, *Gen 21:32 Thus they made a covenant at Beersheba: then Abimelech rose up, and Phichol the chief captain of his host, and they returned into the land of the Philistines. Gen 21:33 And Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the everlasting God. Gen 21:34 And Abraham sojourned in the Philistines' land many days.*

There is another issue Abraham has with Abimelech and that concerns the well of Beersheba. The man, Abimelech must have been reeling at the power of God that Abraham possessed and that the Almighty was with him. He must have thought, "he is a powerful man, one to watch and I had better not get on the bad side of him". Also, Abraham must have viewed Abimelech as an honourable man, to have entertained entering into a covenant with him.

He had probably heard of the promise of God, and the gift of a son, despite the man's old age, and so, prudently, and to secure a good relationship with Abraham, enters into a covenant with him, *Gen*

21:22 And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech and Phichol the chief captain of his host spake unto Abraham, saying, God is with thee in all that thou doest: Gen 21:23 Now therefore swear unto me here by God that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son: but according to the kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned. Gen 21:24 And Abraham said, I will swear.

It seems strange that Abraham would make a covenant with the Philistines, considering the enmity that would develop between them and Israel. Yet it was not all enmity because David went twice to the Philistines when Saul pursued him. *Psa 34:1 A Psalm of David, when he changed his behaviour before Abimelech; who drove him away, and he departed. I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth.* Matthew Henry notes:

The title of this psalm tells us both who penned it and upon what occasion it was penned. David, being forced to flee from his country, which was made too hot for him by the rage of Saul, sought shelter as near it as he could, in the land of the Philistines. There it was soon discovered who he was, and he was brought before the king, who, in the narrative, is called **Achish (his proper name)**, here **Abimelech (his title)**; and lest he should be treated as a spy, or one that came thither upon design, he feigned himself to be a madman (such there have been in every age, that even by idiots men might be taught to give God thanks for the use of their reason), that Achish might dismiss him as a contemptible man, rather than take cognizance of him as a dangerous man. And it had the effect he desired; by this stratagem he escaped the hand that otherwise would have handled him roughly.

Then he goes again to Abimelech, *1Sa 27:1 And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul: there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines; and Saul shall despair of me, to seek me any more in any coast of Israel: so shall I escape out of his hand. 1Sa 27:2 And David arose, and he passed over with the six hundred men that were with him unto Achish, the son of Maach, king of Gath. 1Sa 27:3 And David dwelt with Achish at Gath, he and his men, every man with his household, even David with his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the Carmelitess, Nabal's wife.*

It is the same title, hundreds of years later, Abimelech, who would save the king of the Jews from Saul. The Philistines would be a tool that God used to chastise the nation of Israel, to prove them as to what sort of people they were and incidentally, save them, *Jdg 3:1 Now these are the nations which the LORD left, to prove Israel by them, even as many of Israel as had not known all the wars of Canaan; Jdg 3:2 Only that the generations of the children of Israel might know, to teach them war, at the least such as before knew nothing thereof; Jdg 3:3 Namely, five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians, and the Hivites that dwelt in mount Lebanon, from mount Baalhermon unto the entering in of Hamath. Jdg 3:4 And they were to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the LORD, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses.*

The covenant takes place at the well of Beersheba, the very place that Hagar was sent away and where she was given water by God, *Gen 21:14 And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of **Beersheba**. Gen 21:15 And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs.....Gen 21:19 And God opened her eyes, and she saw a **well of water**; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink.* Was this well one that had been dug by Abraham? We do not know for sure.

Beersheba was to be at the southern border of the land of Israel, *1Ki 4:25 And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon.* It became part of the expression of “all Israel”, the land defined by its borders.



Figure 22 The north and south of Israel

Beersheba is the largest city in the Negev desert of southern Israel. Often referred to as the "Capital of the Negev", it is the centre of the fourth most populous metropolitan area in Israel, the eighth-most populous Israeli city with a population of 209,687.

The Biblical site of Beersheba is Tel Be'er Sheva, lying some 4 km distant from the modern city, which was established at the start of the 20th century by the Ottoman Turks. The city was captured by the British-led Australian Light Horse in the Battle of Beersheba during World War I. In 1947, Bir Seb'a as it was known, was envisioned as part of the Arab state in the United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine. Following the declaration of Israel's independence, the Egyptian army amassed its forces in Beersheba as a strategic and logistical base. In the Battle of Beersheba waged in October 1948, it was conquered by the Israel Defence Forces.

From the present to the past we pick up our story. Abraham makes a covenant with Abimelech, and in the manner of that time they made a sacrifice or more correctly “cut a covenant”, *Gen 21:27 And Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave to Abimelech, and both of them cut a covenant.* LITV. Interestingly, Abimelech had given Abraham sheep and oxen when he was in Gerar. *Gen 20:14 Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male slaves, and slave-girls, and gave to Abraham. And he returned his wife Sarah to him.* The animals were duly slaughtered and the parts separated and the two parties walked between them, signifying the solemnness of the occasion and that the covenant was binding on both parties unto death.

This is the first covenant with a gentile, and with a Philistine at that. You think it strange that Abraham should make a covenant with a Philistine? You forget yourself and who you were. Did you

not behave as a Philistine before you came to the feet of Christ? Were you among the uncircumcised who once said, *"I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together?"* Did you not mock and blaspheme as gentiles, the name in which you now trust? Abimelech is you making peace with Abraham, he is the Gentile coming home to Christ. Abimelech is making a blood covenant with Abraham, uniting the Jew and Gentile in one, by the well of water, as Jesus said: *Joh 4:14 But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.*

The seven ewe lambs are not killed but serve as "witnesses" of the transaction, *Gen 21:28 And Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves. Gen 21:29 And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What mean these seven ewe lambs which thou hast set by themselves? Gen 21:30 And he said, For these seven ewe lambs shalt thou take of my hand, that they may be a witness unto me, that I have digged this well.*

What does this mean? I think that it is to do with Christ, *Rev 5:4 And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon. Rev 5:5 And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof. Rev 5:6 And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.*

God would watch the well and God would watch the Covenant. It is not just a covenant for Abimelech but also for Abraham. The eyes are upon him, to make sure that he is faithful. But much more than that, the eyes of Christ are upon the fledgling nations, who will all be bought low and into sin.

Would you say that the Israelites were any better than the Philistines? *Rom 3:9 What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; Rom 3:10 As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:*

The worst of the Jews were the Pharisees. *Mat 23:13 But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. Mat 23:14 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. Mat 23:15 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. Mat 23:16 Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor! The Pharisee and Sadducee were the legacy of the teaching of Moses and the Jews.*

The Jews, except for a remnant, were as rotten as the Philistines. Abraham and Abimelech, Jew and Gentile, would knock the corners off each other, and both would be made into the image of Christ. Christ would oversee the process to its fulfilment.

41. The test

Gen 22:1 And it came to pass after these things, **that God did tempt** Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. **Gen 22:2** And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. **Gen 22:3** And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.

God did tempt or rather prove Abraham by making him go to the land of Moriah to make a burnt offering. This seems on the face of it a contradiction with the statement of James. *Jas 1:12 Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Jas 1:13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, **neither tempteth he any man:** Jas 1:14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.*

God deliberately tempted Abraham in Genesis but it says in James, He does not tempt him. What does that mean? *Jas 1:13 Don't blame God when you are tempted! God cannot be tempted by evil, and he doesn't use evil to tempt others.* CEV. Is there some Divine casuistry, chicanery, going on?

Look at the occasions when God uses evil.

1Sa 16:14 But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him..... 1Sa 19:9 And the evil spirit from the LORD was upon Saul, as he sat in his house with his javelin in his hand: and David played with his hand..... 1Ki 22:23 Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil concerning thee.....Isa 45:7 I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.

Sending an evil spirit upon a man, sending someone to do your dirty work, doesn't absolve you from the responsibility of having instigated the process. God openly holds His hand up to making evil, and did not the Lord make the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil?

Did not God create the devil, and He uses him? *Job 1:8 And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? Job 1:9 Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Job 1:10 Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. Job 1:11 But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. Job 1:12 And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD.* Handing a man over to another, does not remove you from the responsibility for the action.

Evil is all around us in the world. *Gal 1:4 Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father: We are evil. Mat 7:11 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?* Evil is a principle of life and it came into the world through **sin**.

Let us take a look at James again, more closely, *Jas 1:13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, **neither tempteth he any man**: Jas 1:14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.* It does not say God does not create evil or use evil, He does. It says He cannot be tempted with evil. Evil is a principle that God uses but which does not tempt Him. He is beyond temptation. Why? Because He is good and He determines by His own nature what is good and what is evil. He controls and arbitrates good and evil, and as such cannot be tempted.

What then can it mean that He tempts no man? There is I think a difference between the devil's temptation and the Lord's temptation and it hinges on the nature of sin. God would test man, that he would be the better person, the devil tempts man that he might bring him down to the pit. And it is in these temptations that sin becomes evident and that sin is exploited.

Look at Eve's temptation, *Gen 3:2 And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: Gen 3:3 But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. Gen 3:4 And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: Gen 3:5 For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. Gen 3:6 **And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.***

The tree had been put there to test man. God could have removed the tree from their sight, not included it in the fruit of the garden, but He set it up as a constant temptation to man. It would prove man's obedience, day by day, whether he would serve the Lord or not. God would test man that he would be the better person, the devil tempts man that he might make him evil, a worse person, a person fit the pit. The devil held nothing of the Creator's benevolence but stood to wreck humanity on the rocks of lies.

The way this worked out was, as James says: *Jas 1:14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Jas 1:15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.* Eve was tempted, drawn away in lust after the fruit, looked at the benefits of her action, not the disbenefits, **"the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise"** and the resultant sin burst forth and with it death.

So much of sin is selfish pleasure. Sexual sin especially lends itself to this temptation, *2Sa 13:2 And Amnon was so vexed, that he fell sick for his sister Tamar; for she was a virgin; and Amnon thought it hard for him to do any thing to her.* Amnon had grown fixated upon Tamar and all that he wanted was to conquer her and "sleep" with her, have sexual intercourse with her. When he achieved his aim, he turned and despised her. *2Sa 13:14 Howbeit he would not hearken unto her voice: but, being stronger than she, forced her, and lay with her. 2Sa 13:15 Then Amnon hated her exceedingly; so that the hatred wherewith he hated her was greater than the love wherewith he had loved her. And Amnon said unto her, Arise, be gone.* What seemed a good idea was nothing but selfish desire and to try and rid himself of the guilt he dismisses the situation.

So many people think by moving the chairs about, by removing to a different situation or place, the problem is solved. It is not, because the problem is within you, and for Amnon it cost him his life.

We play the tune according to our nature. When we look back on our lives we shall see how we were led astray by our own selfish lusts, and we shall see the fruit of sin, death, *Isa 53:6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.* We shall see how we fell to temptation, but we shall also see that it was conceived within us, not without. It was NOT the Lord who made us fall to temptation but our own lust. He wanted to see us strong, to call upon the Name of the Lord in temptation, to take His way out, by following Him. *1Co 10:12 Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. 1Co 10:13 There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*

The Lord makes a way of escape because God would test man, that he would be the better person. Tests, temptations, are like obstacles in our lives that can be overcome, making us stronger, or they can be obstacles that bring us down. That is why we pray: *Mat 6:13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.* Temptation is all around us, and we Christians think we are inoculated against it. We are not.

This is HOW the formation of the Christian character comes about, the test of faith, *Jas 1:2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Jas 1:3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.* In the wider sphere of things, it separates out the non-Christian from the Christian. The Christian, the sheep, will hear His voice and live.

The act of judgement comes on the day of judgement, the final judgement, the last judgement, *Mat 25:31 When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: Mat 25:32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: Mat 25:33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Mat 25:34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:*

And yet the reality is that the judgement is ongoing, now, in this age, and those who are the Lord's have escaped the judgement, *1Pe 4:15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. 1Pe 4:16 Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. 1Pe 4:17 For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? 1Pe 4:18 And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?Rom 8:1 So now anyone who is in Christ Jesus is not judged guilty. Rom 8:2 That is because in Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit that brings life made you free. It made you free from the law that brings sin and death. ERV.*

I am sure that you, like me, when we initially accepted Christ as Saviour, did not fully understand the implications. We did not know that it was not just receiving forgiveness on our part, but cutting all ties with our former life, repenting of the sins that we still committed, replacing that old nature which had wrapped itself about us with the new nature. We were a new creature, not the old creature forgiven, and still going on in old ways. We had to renew our mind, *Rom 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye*

transformed by **the renewing of your mind**, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

That is why so many people fall by the wayside, because their minds are not changed but fixed on the world, *Mat 13:22 He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.* They have more care for the world than the things of Christ. It should worry us that this is so.

If it does concern you, what do you do about it, you must indulge in a large dose of self examination, *2Co 13:5 Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?* You must look at yourself, long and hard, in God's mirror, to see what your performance is like, *Jas 1:23 If you hear the message and don't obey it, you are like people who stare at themselves in a mirror Jas 1:24 and forget what they look like as soon as they leave.* CEV. You must not forget who you are and where you came from.

This article is quite helpful," Don't Be Introspective. Examine Yourself", by Kristen Wetherell:

Self-examination is good. Scripture exhorts us to examine and test ourselves (2 Cor. 13:5). So how might this important spiritual discipline take a turn for the worse? Martyn Lloyd-Jones explains:

What's the difference between examining oneself and becoming introspective? I suggest that we cross the line from self-examination to introspection when, in a sense, we do nothing but examine ourselves, and when such self-examination becomes the main and chief end in our life.

Though self-examination can be rewarding for Christian growth, I've often crossed the line—and learned how detrimental introspection can be. Its unprofitable because its an end in itself; it leaves us navel-gazing and discouraged. I've hung my head many times in its defeat. Nevertheless, we can look to God's Word and see how self-examination, rightly deployed, is healthy and effective.

A look at Psalm 139 will help us grasp the power of self-examination as a tool in God's hands for our growth. ***O LORD, you have searched me and known me! . . . Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.*** (vv. 1, 6)

Here David exults in the all-knowing, all-seeing Lord of all creation. No corner of God's human design—our bodies, minds, or hearts—exists outside his intimate knowledge. What a comfort that God knows us perfectly!

God's searching ministry is accomplished by his Spirit. We don't examine ourselves by our own wisdom and knowledge but by His revealing work. We can pray: "Almighty God, you know every corner of my being, far more than I could ever know. By your Spirit, give me eyes to see what's going on in my heart and mind. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, but not for you. Search me and know me, God."

Self-examination isn't ultimately empowered by us, but by the One who made us—and we can trust him to use what he reveals for our good.

The only one who convicts us is God, that is Christ, *Luk 5:7 And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. Luk 5:8 When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. Luk 5:9 For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken:*

You will watch and be vigilant, *1Th 5:5 Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. 1Th 5:6 Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. You will take heed, 1Ti 4:16 Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.* But ultimately, if you are doing this in your own strength it will come to nought.

This must be one of the greatest subjects to pray about, and it is a prayer of David, *Psa 139:23 Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: Psa 139:24 And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

You can pray for all manner of things, and rightly so, but if you neglect your soul, if you do not put it under the gaze of God, you are neglecting the most precious thing God has given you. You say, “it is selfish to pray for myself”, but is it? Is it not the final petition of the Lord's prayer? *Mat 6:9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Mat 6:10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Mat 6:11 Give us this day our daily bread. Mat 6:12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. Mat 6:13 And **lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:** For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.*

There it is, “**And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil**”. How does it happen? By self examination of the soul, we learn from God the way of life. Just as Abraham did.

42. O Jerusalem

Gen 22:2 And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.

This place that he would go to was then known as the land of Moriah. Moriah, Jebus the city of the Jebusites, Jerusalem, Zion and the city of David, all lie in the same area. What exactly are the places and how do they relate to Israel?

In a latter day Solomon would build the Temple on Moriah, *2Ch 3:1 Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem in mount Moriah, where the LORD appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite.*

Ornan lived in David's day, and had a place for beating out the sheaves of wheat on Mount Moriah, where the Temple would be built. It should not surprise us that the place which would become famous throughout the world for sacrificial worship, had as a foundation a threshing floor. We are the wheat which is sacred to God, *Mat 13:30 Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.*

The event that precipitated the building of the Temple started in the sin of David numbering the people. *1Ch 21:11 So Gad came to David, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Choose thee 1Ch 21:12 Either three years' famine; or three months to be destroyed before thy foes, while that the sword of thine enemies overtaketh thee; or else three days the sword of the LORD, even the pestilence, in the land, and the angel of the LORD destroying throughout all the coasts of Israel. Now therefore advise thyself what word I shall bring again to him that sent me. 1Ch 21:13 And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let me fall now into the hand of the LORD; for very great are his mercies: but let me not fall into the hand of man. 1Ch 21:14 So the LORD sent pestilence upon Israel: and there fell of Israel seventy thousand men. 1Ch 21:15 And God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it: and as he was destroying, the LORD beheld, and he repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed, It is enough, stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD stood by the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite. 1Ch 21:16 And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the LORD stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces. 1Ch 21:17 And David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed; but as for these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, O LORD my God, be on me, and on my father's house; but not on thy people, that they should be plagued.*

Salem was the place where Melchizedek lived, and presumably he was a Jebusite, *Gen 14:18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God..... Psa 76:2 In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling place in Zion.*



Figure 24 Jerusalem at the time of Christ

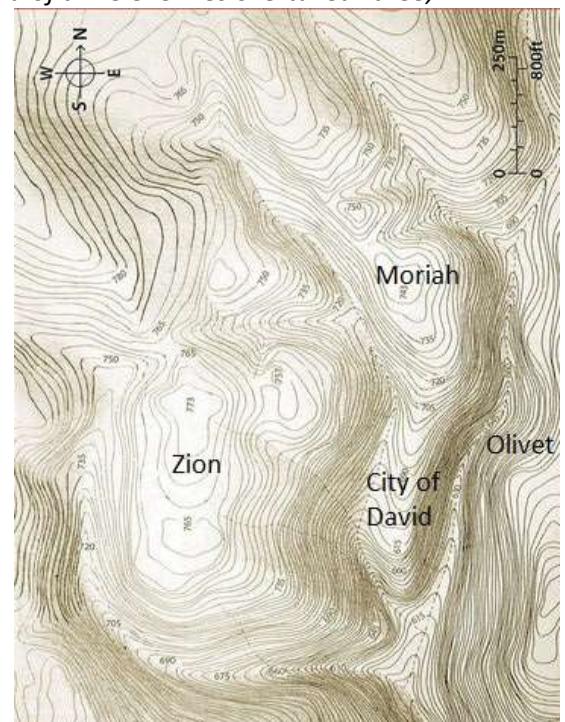


Figure 23 The topography of Jerusalem

Zion was a castle or fortress of the Jebusites and was the place captured by David and secured as his fortress. *2Sa 5:7 Nevertheless David took the strong hold of Zion: the same is the city of David. 2Sa 5:8 And David said on that day, Whosoever getteth up to the gutter, and smiteth the Jebusites, and the lame and the blind, that are hated of David's soul, he shall be chief and captain. Wherefore they said, The blind and the lame shall not come into the house. 2Sa 5:9 So David dwelt in the fort, and called it the city of David. And David built round about from Millo and inward.....1Ch 11:5 And the inhabitants of Jebus said to David, Thou shalt not come hither. Nevertheless David took the castle of Zion, which is the city of David.*



Figure 25 Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives

Having taken this final piece of land, the whole area would be known as Jerusalem, *1Ki 8:1 Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the chief of the fathers of the children of Israel, unto king Solomon **in Jerusalem**, that they might bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which is Zion. 1Ki 8:2 And all the men of Israel assembled themselves unto king Solomon at the feast in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month. 1Ki 8:3 And all the elders of Israel came, and the priests took up the ark.*

Thus the worship of Israel was established and grounded in a permanent location, making the transition from the Tabernacle to the Temple, at Jerusalem, the City of David, Zion of the people of God.

The Jews obviously felt superior because of this singular privilege but this was their downfall. They relied too much on a natural birth and not enough on the Spiritual birth. Was Israel a truly righteous nation? Was it, for example, more righteous than Egypt, or more righteous than Babylon? Was there a league table of righteousness, a grading of the nations, a “top ten” of the best of the best? The Israelites certainly had an advantage, *Rom 9:3 For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: **Rom 9:4** Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Rom 9:5 Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.*

That advantage was only of value if they followed the law without being corrupted by the nations around them, *Jos 23:11 Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the LORD your God. Jos 23:12 Else if ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, even these that remain among you, and shall make marriages with them, and go in unto them, and they to you: Jos 23:13 Know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you.*

This was the problem. They had the promises of God to Abraham, and because of this, saw “chosen” people of the lineage of Abraham as a synonym for “righteous” people. But you see, “chosen” is not the same as “righteous”. This is made clear by the Baptist, *Mat 3:9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.* They had neglected to see themselves as sinners in a sinful world, no better than anyone else, sinners saved by God’s grace. Some even flaunted this perceived righteousness, *Luk 18:11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.*

Jesus attacks the self-righteousness of the religious elite, the people who should have known better, the leaders of God’s flock. If the people suffered, they suffered because of the hypocritical leadership, *Mal 1:6 A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name? Mal 1:7 Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the LORD is contemptible. Mal 1:8 And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the LORD of hosts.*

The majority of Jews did not attain to their high calling, and as Paul says in the book of Romans, they were like discarded branches of what was a good Olive tree, *Rom 11:17 And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree;* They failed their calling. Did this amount to a failure of God’s plan, a hiatus in God’s arrangement, a need for Him to reconsider what had happened and try again at a later date, as the Dispensationalist Darby theorized, making the Church the interim body, until the Jews were restored, and the restoration would somehow involve the earthly Temple at Jerusalem?

I do not think so. So how do all of the places fit together in God’s plan? Jerusalem was a nexus, a focus of all the components of Heaven. Jerusalem was a portal, a door to the heavenly Jerusalem. Jesus never spoke of His kingdom as in this world, *Joh 18:36 Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.*

Jesus, the King of the Kingdom of Heaven, spoke of a glorious Exodus, just like the one in Egypt, but this time it would be leaving from Jerusalem, not Egypt, *Luk 9:31 Appearing in glory, they spoke of His exodus, which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem.* It was an Exodus to which the law and the prophets agreed, and to show they agreed, they appeared with Him, *Luk 9:30 And, behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah. Luk 9:31 Appearing in glory, they spoke of His exodus, which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem.*

Christ spoke to the Samaritan woman about true worship, *Joh 4:19 The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet. Joh 4:20 Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Joh 4:21 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, Joh 4:22 Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. Joh*

4:23 But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. Joh 4:24 God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

Jesus said that the place of worship was unimportant compared to the attitude of worship. Worship in Spirit and Truth was what was desired of them, not worship on this mountain or on that mountain.

When Abraham trudged off to Mount Moriah, he did so because God had directed him to go. We are directed by the same God to spiritual and true worship. How can we adopt practices and places that God has never asked for and say that we are worshipping in truth? How can we say this is spiritual? These are other gods, *Deu 4:16 Lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female, Deu 4:17 The likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flieth in the air, Deu 4:18 The likeness of any thing that creepeth on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the waters beneath the earth: Deu 4:19 And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the LORD thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven. Deu 4:20 But the LORD hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto him a people of inheritance, as ye are this day.*

Well, would you make a graven image and worship it? Would you sacrifice an animal for the forgiveness of sin? Would you set up the ancient ways of worship, like the temple of Solomon? No you would not. So why do you continue with the religious practices that God has not given you, “the traditions of men”?

Heb 12:22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, Heb 12:23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, Heb 12:24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. Heb 12:25 See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: Heb 12:26 Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. Heb 12:27 And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Heb 12:28 Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: Heb 12:29 For our God is a consuming fire.

You will ask why I have not gone into the typology of Christ, showing Isaac and Abraham in their Christological roles, why I have not looked at the sacrifice of Isaac in relation to Christ? Why I have not focused on Christ? It is because everyone looks for Christ and that does nothing for us as individuals unless we are active in our pursuit of Him. We glance at the shadow and are well please with ourselves at finding Him and we go away unchanged by the event.

We are like people viewing an art gallery, enjoying the paintings and moving on. We are like people on a train journey, looking out of a window, admiring the scenery and passing through the landscape, never interacting with it. That is how the Bible appears to many, a panorama, of which we have no part, but that should not be true. We should be in the pages of the Book we read, *Rom 15:3 For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me. Rom 15:4 For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*

What are we to engage in, to be involved in, as a result of the passage before us? It is that Abraham was totally obedient to the call of God, *Gen 22:14 And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovahjireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen. Gen 22:15 And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, Gen 22:16 And said, **By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son:** Gen 22:17 That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies;*

Abraham followed his heavenly Father precisely and like faithful Abraham we should be doers of the word, not mere observers of the word. The Lord had taken Abraham to the end of self, where else was there to go but to Him alone.

Abraham had heard the words of God, “I am thy shield and exceeding great reward”. Now he knew what it meant.

43. The purchase

Gen 23:1 And Sarah was an hundred and seven and twenty years old: these were the years of the life of Sarah. Gen 23:2 And Sarah died in Kirjatharba; the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan: and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her. The moment that Abraham had dreaded had come. He was face to face with the mortality of someone he loved, mourning and weeping was now his food. He is old and that vigour of youth is past, the time when all things were possible has gone, his strength as a man has departed and he is vulnerable. He is not the Abram of youth, the Abraham of his middle years, full of strength, he is the sad and sorrowful Abraham of lonely old age.

Do we feel Abraham’s sorrow, feel with him, mourn with him, want to put an arm around him to comfort him in spirit? Probably not, if we ever thought about it, after all it was a long time ago. But we do feel, or rather should feel, the sorrow and sadness over Christ’s death. Why do we feel the sorrow over one and not of the other? Why have we little or no empathy with the grieving saints, or any who mourn their great loss? What is it that makes us indifferent to some others personal grief, after all it says: *Rom 12:15 Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.*

It is all very well being stoic in matters relating to one’s self, but to others, who may ask for a shoulder to cry on, it is a hard heart that refuses. You may think that it is a good attitude to let the “dead bury the dead” and to have an approach that those who do not are weak. But those words

have a context, *Luk 9:59 And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Luk 9:60 Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.*

We often quote scripture without seeing the context, using verses as proof texts or statements backing our views, without seeing the wider meaning. I was once at a “church” who chose the following verse to start an evangelistic campaign: *Jer 2:25 I have loved strangers, and after them will I go.* It seems quite a good verse to choose, expressing the sentiments of the congregation in seeking the lost, but wait a minute, is that verse appropriate to use. If it is being wrongly used, out of the context it was given in, what are we to say about the honesty or knowledge of the people using it to teach the unbeliever?

The context of the verse is dealing with Israel’s apostasy, and a wider reading shows this. *Jer 2:23 How canst thou say, I am not polluted, I have not gone after Baalim? see thy way in the valley, know what thou hast done: thou art a swift dromedary traversing her ways; Jer 2:24 A wild ass used to the wilderness, that snuffeth up the wind at her pleasure; in her occasion who can turn her away? all they that seek her will not weary themselves; in her month they shall find her. Jer 2:25 Withhold thy foot from being unshod, and thy throat from thirst: but thou saidst, There is no hope: no; for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go.* LITV. The last verse may be rendered: *Jer 2:25 Your shoes are worn out, and your throat is parched from running here and there to worship foreign gods. "Stop!" I shouted, but you replied, "No! I love those gods too much."* CEV.

What of that other verse, “let the dead bury their dead”, *Luk 9:60 Let the dead bury their dead*, is not an attitude expressed towards the dead, but an exhortation to the living. To the man who would engage himself with the affairs of this life, who would put the matters of the world first, Jesus rebukes and says, “you want to follow me, then get your priorities right, because the kingdom has priority”, *Luk 9:59 He told another man, "Follow me!" But the man said, "Sir, first let me go to bury my father." Luk 9:60 But Jesus told him, "Let the dead bury their own dead. You must go everywhere and tell about the kingdom of God." Luk 9:61 Another said, "I'll follow you, sir, but first let me tell my family goodbye." Luk 9:62 Jesus said to him, "Whoever starts to plow and looks back is not fit for the kingdom of God."* GW.

Did Jesus care so little for Lazarus that He would have shrugged off his death with “let the dead bury him”? Would He have caused Mary and Martha yet more grief by saying such hard and uncaring words at such a time? Do you think that Jesus cared so little for the dead that He would make such a hard hearted and feelingless comment about the dead? No, and his attitude towards the dead shows His humanity in the shortest verse in the Bible, *Joh 11:35 Jesus wept.*

I think Christ shows more humanity than us, and this is probably because He had a focus on His Mission. We are just trying to get through life with the occasional nod to Christianity. The bit of charity to salve the conscience, the sporadic witness to the grace of Christ, the morning devotion that is soon forgotten and the meeting of believers, but the majority of time is devoted to us. Just

doing time with occasional bursts of religion, until the call home occurs. We lack the commitment to full time ministry and leave that to the professional religious class.

But Jesus really cared for the lost souls as He did for His disciples. He saw the world gripped by sin, and He took occasion to confront that evil, particularly where it had its origin in the lives of religious leaders. His care did not stop with the declaration of redemption, but how the person could live and have a relationship with Him.

“Jesus wept” is in my mind the biggest declaration of Jesus’ humanity because it really shows Him in the frailty of the flesh, the helplessness of grief. But as has been said, “the Lord’s true humanity fades away from our view in the splendour of His Divinity, so close was the union of man with God. But it was manhood, as perfect as that worn by any of our race. He was born as the children are born, a partaker of their “flesh and blood”; and He was nursed as the children are nursed, growing “in wisdom and stature.” He was hungry, and He ate; He was thirsty, and He drank; He was weary, and He lay down: He was fatigued, and He slept; He was smitten, and He died.

But the Evangelist, from the first, lays down the principle: The word was made *flesh*. “It is not with a heart of stone that the dead are raised,” says Hengstenberg. Hebrews teaches us that he who would help the unhappy must first of all surrender his heart to feel that very suffering from which he desires to deliver them. *Heb 2:16 For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Heb 2:17 Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. Heb 2:18 For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.* It is a remarkable thing that the very Gospel in which the Deity of Jesus is most clearly asserted is also that which makes us best acquainted with the profoundly human side of His life”

Joh 11:33 When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, Joh 11:34 And said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see. Joh 11:35 Jesus wept. Joh 11:36 Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him!

Abraham’s tears cannot be because he will not see his beloved Sarah again, he most certainly will. It is a short in between and will be lost in the immensity of the enjoyment of God. So why does he weep? He weeps because it is human to weep. In that instant of loss there is the emotion that God has given to enable full expression of it, in a way no other emotion could have expressed it. Before the first tears of men, **God had appropriated this grief into Himself**. Firstly this is His pain, God’s pain and suffering at the death of Christ, His beloved Son. It is a gift to us to experience with God, that loss.

The grief and pain of separation from one whom you love, was first experienced by the Father. I think that we cry because we are given to experience our heavenly Fathers grief. If we experience that, we are well on our way to empathy with Him. When we cry we are expressing an emotion discovered first in God. It was the emotion that could not be found in heaven, apart from the death of Christ, the separation from a loving Father. And thus found, it was given to men to discover in themselves, the sorrow of losing a loved one.

When salvation is presented to us, when redemption is offered, it too should not be a thing that happens without the grief of death. We do not just take the gift of Salvation as a judicial sentence, a cold transaction with no emotion, but we sorrow for our sin that made such a horrible death necessary for the Saviour of mankind. If we cannot shed tears for sin then we have not experienced the Fathers sorrow and most probably have a low view of sin, and the salvation which we seek is not the salvation that God offers.

Luk 7:44 And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Luk 7:45 Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. Luk 7:46 My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Luk 7:47 Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. Crying is a measure of love, an expression of love, and that primarily at the death of Christ.

When we arrive in Glory, having known the pain of sin and death, they will have served their purpose and are not needed any longer. *Rev 21:3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. Rev 21:4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, **neither sorrow, nor crying**, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.*

Those who do not experience the Fathers grief, are doomed to go on experiencing grief for ever, *Mat 8:11 And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. Mat 8:12 But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

It says of our father Abraham: *Heb 11:9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: Heb 11:10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.* This was the only land that Abraham had purchased, a burial ground.

God of course had given him the land, but he never received it in this life, *Heb 11:13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Heb 11:14 For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. Heb 11:15 And truly, if*

*they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. Heb 11:16 But **now they desire a better country**, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.*

It almost shows contempt for his earthly inheritance, that Abraham should make an inheritance among the dead, not amongst the living, *Gen 23:4 I am a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a buryingplace with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.* It is as if he thinks so little of God's promise to him, of the land, that he turns to God and says, "no, I will buy my own land, and put my dead in it". He is showing contempt for God's promise, or is he?

No, he saw the truth of God's promise, for its fulfilment did not lie in this world, on this earth, in this universe. It was not the earthly land that he had been promised or else why would he buy it? He saw the promise for what it truly was, *Heb 11:16 But **now they desire a better country**, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.* Abraham anticipated the City of God.

The tomb was to be a memorial. Its first occupant being Sarah the mother of all the faithful sons of Abraham. How appropriate the empty tomb of Christ is, because in His death He has made it possible for Sarah's sons to live again, *Joh 14:18 I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Joh 14:19 Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: **because I live, ye shall live also.** Joh 14:20 At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.*

Sarah's is the first recorded funeral in the Bible, but it does not describe the rights or ceremonies that go with it, if any. Abraham's concern is for a burial place and he finds one at Hebron, "fellowship", for he is one with the dead, *Heb 12:22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, Heb 12:23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, Heb 12:24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.*

A funeral can be of little use to the corpse of the departed, for the soul has passed on. It is the last rite performed for the dead by the living. The Quakers have a good approach to funerals. They do not dress morbidly or grieve excessively but speak of the good that the person did in their lives. And because they never saw themselves above others they all adopted similar small grave markers, equal in life equal in death.

I recall the little Quaker graveyard next to Bunhill Field on the City Road in London. They have kept the decaying main graveyard, which contains the remains of Watts, Bunyan, Defoe, Blake and many other notable persons, a veritable "Machpelah" for non-conformists. Adjacent to this burial ground, the Quakers bought their first piece of freehold property in London (like Abraham), and interred 12,000 bodies including the founder George Fox. I last saw the Quaker Burial ground in the 1970's with its rows of simple markers, but sadly since then it has been largely redeveloped, unlike its more ostentatious non-conformist neighbour at Bunhill Fields.

The passing of a human life seems pathetic to the living, with all that was magnificent about the individual taken forever. Like a fly discarded by a spider, an empty husk, the life sucked out, it is just a shell. Soon it will be forgotten as each generation fades away, and perhaps only a half legible stone marker remains, until that too has gone.

But you are not of those who perish my brethren. When you leave your body, it is the beginning of your life. Glory beckons you. As for this life, it is a distant memory, but you go to a far better place, and sit with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of God.

44. The importance of a good family

Gen 24:1 And Abraham was old, and well stricken in age: and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. Gen 24:2 And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh: Gen 24:3 And I will make thee swear by the LORD, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell: Gen 24:4 But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac.

One of the last acts of Abraham is to secure a wife for his son, even though his son is forty, *Gen 25:20 And Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah to wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padanaram, the sister to Laban the Syrian,* He still chooses a wife for him, and no doubt experience has given Abraham wisdom of the nature of the Canaanite women, and therefore he looks back to his near kin in Haran.

As I read this, I thought, that is a bit hypocritical of Abraham, when he takes another wife **after** Sarah's death, and has other children that he does not seem to have the same care for, *Gen 25:1 Then again Abraham took a wife, and her name was Keturah. Gen 25:2 And she bare him Zimran, and Jokshan, and Medan, and Midian, and Ishbak, and Shuah. Gen 25:3 And Jokshan begat Sheba, and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim, and Letushim, and Leummim. Gen 25:4 And the sons of Midian; Ephah, and Epher, and Hanoah, and Abida, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah. Gen 25:5 And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac. Gen 25:6 But unto the sons of the concubines, which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, unto the east country.*

Young's Literal version puts it this way: *Gen 25:1 And Abraham addeth and taketh a wife, and her name is Keturah; YLT.* It says "Abraham addeth a wife" but it doesn't say when he added her, and it certainly doesn't say, "after these things", suggesting a continuity of events. *Gen 15:1 **After these things** the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. Gen 22:1 And it came to pass **after these things**, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. Gen 22:20 And it came to pass **after these things**, that it was told Abraham, saying, Behold, Milcah, she hath also born children*

unto thy brother Nahor; So as to the time of the events, it is not clear, and it could be a good number of years earlier.

The scriptures are not necessarily sequential. For example, Judges chapters 17 to 21 should chronologically occur at the beginning of the book. Why do they occur at the end? It perhaps keeps bringing the attention to the Benjaminites who are the focus of the early part of the next book, 1 Samuel (or 1 Kings if you are using the Latin Vulgate).

Now imagine if these verses had appeared just before Abraham had left Haran, in Genesis chapter 12 verse 1, what would we have thought of him. This would always have been nagging in our minds and may have detracted from the relationship that developed with God, Sarah and Hagar. I think that these verses have been put as **a postscript** to Abraham's life, for this very reason, but there are other reasons for coming to this conclusion.

Abraham had difficulty having children in later life, in fact it had become impossible,. *Gen 17:17 Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?* God intervened and gave him a son, Isaac, and through **faith** he was given this son, *Rom 4:19 And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb: Rom 4:20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; Rom 4:21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. Rom 4:22 And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.*

I think that he was given faith for this supernatural event only. To say that his body was regenerated, given a new lease on life, given his youth again, is not proven. If it were, then would not Sarah's also be regenerated, and in the years to come, would she have born other children? So why should we think that Abraham gets a new lease on life, and a new wife **after** Sarah, Keturah, to continue begetting? It is more likely that the event detailing Keturah's children occurred in the past, most likely in Haran, before God called Abraham. Those men listed in Genesis chapter 25 are probably 50 years old when Isaac is born.

There is another reason I adopt this view. *Gen 25:5 And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac. Gen 25:6 But unto the sons of the concubines, which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, unto the east country.* Notice "unto the sons of the concubines". The concubines are at the least Hagar and Keturah.

When did Abraham send them away? Possibly at the birth of Isaac or perhaps just before he was 99 years old, having completed the circumcision, *Gen 17:24 And Abraham was ninety years old and nine, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. Gen 17:25 And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. Gen 17:26 In the selfsame day was Abraham circumcised, and Ishmael his son. Gen 17:27 And all the men of his house, born in the house, and bought with money of the stranger, were circumcised with him.*

Separating his other sons from Isaac, and sending them eastward, is not unloving or unkind, but shows the obedience to God, in making the difference between the covenant people and the other children, *Rom 9:7 Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. Rom 9:8 That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.* It is left to the end of Abraham's life to make this distinction and I think this is why the verses are put at the end, rather than in chronological sequence, at the beginning of his journey.

And what of the wife for his son Isaac? *Gen 24:1 And Abraham was old, and well stricken in age: and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. Gen 24:2 And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh: Gen 24:3 And I will make thee swear by the LORD, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell: Gen 24:4 But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac.*

He instructed his eldest servant, and he trusted his eldest servant to get him a wife for his son. In fact he made him take an oath, *Gen 24:2 And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh: Gen 24:3 And I will make thee swear by the LORD, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell:* This is a strange thing to do.

It probably has something to do with swearing upon the generations to come, promising them that he would perform his task. This is done by putting the hand under the thigh, the procreative organs, to symbolise this. I say symbolise, because Jacob, when he makes a similar request, has had his children, and is approaching death. *Gen 47:29 And the time drew nigh that Israel must die: and he called his son Joseph, and said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me; bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt: Gen 47:30 But I will lie with my fathers, and thou shalt carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their buryingplace. And he said, I will do as thou hast said.*

We give little attention to this faithful man, the servant, who could have run off with his goods and left him high and dry, and instead we look to Rebekah, who generally occupies our attention, for her service. But it is this man, the servant who finds her, and as we shall see is directed by the angel of God.

We do not know if this was Eliezer of Damascus, *Gen 15:2 And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? Gen 15:3 And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. Gen 15:4 And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.* He is the servant without name, known unto God.

The servants were often highly esteemed, and a steward was given a position of trust in the household. The servant could inherit from his master, and this was often the case where there were no offspring or son to inherit the master's property. So can you imagine the disappointment the servant had, to be actively seeking to find a wife for his master's son? He had lost the inheritance in

virtue of the son coming along and supplanting him, and now to add insult to injury, the servant had to find him a wife.

This servant had learned the lesson of true service, *Eph 6:5 Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; Eph 6:6 Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; Eph 6:7 With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men:..... 1Ti 6:1 Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed.*

Where had he learned this? Perhaps he had learned it from his master? We often underestimate the lessons we give to others by just living the Christian life and saying nothing. Christians have got it into their heads that unless they speak the Gospel, the person will not come to Christ, but this is not so. The way you do things is very important, *1Pe 3:1 Wives, in a similar way, place yourselves under your husbands' authority. Some husbands may not obey God's word. Their wives could win these men for Christ by the way they live without saying anything. GW.*

People see hypocrisy in the contrast between your conduct and what you say, I suppose because words are cheap. We all look to behaviour as the criterion of what a man is like, *Mat 5:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.* By doing things Christ's way, you get the idea of what is like to be a Christian, because it is in the actions not the words. You get the idea of what it is required of a servant from the actions of one giving service. Abraham's service to God was a lesson to his servant and it is a lesson to us.

One can see the servant was godly in that he committed his way unto the Lord, *Gen 24:7 The LORD God of heaven, which took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land; he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence.....Gen 24:12 And he said, O LORD God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham.....Gen 24:13 Behold, I stand here by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water: Gen 24:14 And let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast shewed kindness unto my master.....Gen 24:21 And the man wondering at her held his peace, to wit whether the LORD had made his journey prosperous or not.....Gen 24:26 And the man bowed down his head, and worshipped the LORD. Gen 24:27 And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and his truth: I being in the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master's brethren.....Gen 24:40 And he said unto me, The LORD, before whom I walk, will send his angel with thee, and prosper thy way; and thou shalt take a wife for my son of my kindred, and of my father's house:Gen 24:52 And it came to pass, that, when Abraham's servant heard their words, he worshipped the LORD, bowing himself to the earth.*

The servant had Angels on his shoulder. He was specific in his request, he watched to see it performed and when it was he gave thanks. It is a model for working with God, *Psa 37:5 Roll your*

way on Jehovah and trust in Him; and He will work. Psa 37:6 And He will bring forth your righteousness like the light; and your judgment like the noon day.

What did he look for in the wife for his son? Abraham stipulated one thing, that the woman is not a Canaanite, *“that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell”*. That she was not of the culture of the land. What does that mean? “Culture encompasses religion, food, what we wear, how we wear it, our language, marriage, music, what we believe is right or wrong, how we sit at the table, how we greet visitors, how we behave with loved ones, and a million other things.” The word “culture” derives from a French term, which in turn derives from the Latin “colere,” which means to tend to the earth and grow, or cultivation and nurture. “It shares its etymology with a number of other words related to actively fostering growth.”

A worldview is how you see things. “A worldview is how you look at the world, how you think it operates, why things happen the way they do, what your purpose is. For example, a worldview of atheism, which is a belief that God does not exist, explains the creation of the universe and of life as randomness acting over a very long time.” In my opinion culture can lead to the world view that you hold, though not necessarily. You may live in a heathen culture but hold a different world view. But they are similar constructs that we use to make sense of the world around us.

Abraham has developed a worldview which is, that the Creator Christ has made man for a purpose, that He has separated him from the nature that exists in mankind in general, that he is made to serve God utterly and totally and that he looks forward to living in a kingdom not of this making. From this view, a culture of the believer develops which is a Christian culture. Any attempt to bring in other ideas, to change his worldview by letting an alien culture permeate his realm, is to destroy his realm and so, he looks to the place where he came from, where worldview and culture are similar.

Christian parents unfortunately do not have Abraham’s thoughtfulness. Is an arranged marriage such a bad thing? Rather than let raging hormones select a wife on the dance floor, in the drink and drug fuelled raves of a “good time”, is it not better to have one chosen in the cold light of reality, from things which are more important than the dance floor? After all, life is not lived on the dance hall. It’s about 50/50 whether you make a good choice, since 42 per cent of marriages end in divorce.

The unequal yoke is of no matter to the parents who think that their children can make a good choice and their Christianity is so weak that they are ambivalent as to whether they choose a believer or not. It is proved time and again that humanity gravitates to the lowest common denominator, and that believers will lower their standards if yoked to the unbeliever. Why do you think God gave people to be parents? Because their children are not fit to make rational decisions, *Pro 22:15 Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.*

The best woman would be chosen from a non-Canaanite and the criteria would be left to the servant and the Lord. Good choices, all the way round!

45. The end of a era

Abraham must have known that the Lord did not accept human sacrifice, after all it was Christ who directed Him in what he was doing. This act of human sacrifice was to show that God would not accept a sinful human as a burnt offering, or any other offering come to that. Isaac was a sinner, an imperfect sacrifice and that was that.

So why go through the act of offering him when it would not be accepted? It brings out the nature of true sacrifice. *Lev 1:3 If his offering be a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish: he shall offer it of his own voluntary will at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the LORD. Lev 1:4 And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.*

It shows us that no man can offer a sinful sacrifice and be accepted by God. Only one human sacrifice in the history of mankind has been good enough for that, *Heb 10:11 And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: Heb 10:12 But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; Heb 10:13 From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. Heb 10:14 For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Heb 10:15 Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, Heb 10:16 This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; Heb 10:17 And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Heb 10:18 Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.*

Abraham did what he was told and was obedient, *Gen 22:10 And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. Gen 22:11 And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. Gen 22:12 And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.*

Isaac was a living sacrifice, as we too should be, *Rom 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.* We are in a manner of speaking, each of us, Isaac's and each one son's of Abraham. *Rom 9:7 Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. Rom 9:8 That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.*

He saw the sin in the flesh of his "only begotten" son, but he was a shadow of that which was to come, *Heb 11:17 By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,..... 1Jn 4:9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.* Not only son but **only begotten**, μονογενής = monogenēs. This is not the "only" son that Abraham had or God for that matter, but it was the "only begotten" in terms of the relationship with the father/Father. It was a special relationship.

It was a type, a shadow of what was to come. This was the culmination of Abraham's life, for all he did was leading him to the hill of Calvary, to the cross. Though it was many, many years before the event occurred, he had taken the journey with Christ to this place of death. His own life, so rich in the types and shadows of Christ, was leading him homeward to the real event.

He partook of Christ's death proleptically, before the death had taken place, but as if it had taken place. Abraham entered into the death of Christ and was forgiven, as surely as you believe and in the same manner. So sure was God that nothing would hinder the death of Christ that He gave out forgiveness to those in the Old Testament by the same method as those in the New Covenant, *Heb 11:39 And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: Heb 11:40 God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.*

It is no surprise to read that Jesus said: *Joh 8:56 Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.*

So his earthly life draws to a close. *Gen 25:7 And these are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived, an hundred threescore and fifteen years. Gen 25:8 Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people. Gen 25:9 And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre;*

There you might think that his life ended, full of years, and that he departed into everlasting rest. But Abraham did not sleep in the grave until the final judgement, that is in a state of unconsciousness, inactivity of the soul, lifelessness. Surely the scripture says he does? *1Th 4:13 But I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning those who sleep, that you not grieve, as the rest also, not having hope. 1Th 4:14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will also bring with Him all those who have fallen asleep through Jesus. 1Th 4:15 For we say this to you in the Word of the Lord, that we the living who remain to the coming of the Lord will not at all go before those who have fallen asleep.*

Does not Jesus say of Lazarus that he slept? *Joh 11:11 He said these things. And after this, He said to them, Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going that I may awaken him. Joh 11:12 Then His disciples said, Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover. Joh 11:13 But Jesus had spoken about his death, but they thought that He spoke of the sleep of slumber. Joh 11:14 Therefore, then Jesus said to them plainly, Lazarus has died. Sleep is a euphemism for death, and viewed from the position of the living, the person looks asleep, but they are dead and this leads people to think that that is the end.*

That is the dividing line between life and death, in the physical realm and because we cannot see beyond it with these eyes, we take it that it is all there is. But go to the other side of physical death and you have spiritual life. Not sleep, not unconsciousness, not inactivity, not soul sleep, not annihilation, you have abundant life. When the dead are raised from sleep, in the physical realm, the souls come back with Jesus, *1Th 4:16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: 1Th 4:17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to*

meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. 1Th 4:18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

If you want further proof of life after death, now, look at the transfiguration, *Luk 9:29 And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening. Luk 9:30 And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: Luk 9:31 Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.* Moses and Elijah did not just appear, they conversed about Christ's death, and far from being asleep they were wide awake and engaged in the subject of His death. They like Abraham knew what was coming.

Enoch too had a miraculous transition such that he never even saw death, *Gen 5:24 And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.....Heb 11:5 By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.*

It is a subject we could go on about. Death. It is not the end but the beginning, for although it holds sinful men in the grip of fear, there is nothing to fear in Christ, *Heb 2:14 Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; Heb 2:15 **And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.** Heb 2:16 For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but **he took on him the seed of Abraham.** Heb 2:17 Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.* It says He, *"took on him the seed of Abraham"* to achieve this.

Abraham was not finished, although his life here was finished, eternity beckoned and he would begin a new life and a new career, as the "father" who would **not** be able to help the wayward Jew, but he would **comfort** the faithful, *Luk 16:26 And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence..... Luk 16:23 And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.*

He transitioned to a new life from the "father of the people", to the "comforter of the people", *Luk 16:24 And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. Luk 16:25 But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.*

Just as Abraham had a new lease on life, scripture tells us that we also have a new lease on life and a new direction and a new name, *Isa 56:3 Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the LORD, speak, saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree. Isa 56:4 For thus saith the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; Isa 56:5 Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls **a place and a name** better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off. Yad v'shem.*

We have a place in the kingdom and it involves a task, like Abraham was given. Not the same task but one of great importance to God. The parable of the talents is a parable of the kingdom, and the degree of reward in the kingdom is a measure of diligence now, *Mat 25:20 And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. Mat 25:21 His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, **I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.***

We have a new name, *Rev 2:17 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.*

A new place, a change of identity, a change of location, and a change of name. A true relocation programme. Whatever you were is erased, whatever wrong you did is wiped clean. You will be as your maker wants you to be, and made better than the first Adam, you will be as the second Adam.

Perhaps this is the reason that God never says anything derogatory about the saints who are dead, Look at Hebrews chapter 11, and the list of the faithful. *Heb 11:36 And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: Heb 11:37 They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; Heb 11:38 (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.* Yet in life you could find something bad about them but it is not there when they are dead. They are given the new identity for a purpose, they are free from the world of sin. It is a lesson to us not to speak ill of saints who have gone from death to life.

What memorial would you put up for Abraham, not of course for him, but to remind us of his sterling qualities? You could have that, “He was the father of Jesus”, “The father of the faithful”, “He is not here he is alive”, “Covenant keeper”, “Comforter”, “He rejoiced to see the day of Christ”, “Righteous among nations”, “Blessed”. All of these are true of him but I think that there is one thing that sums him up better than all, “Friend of God”.

That a mere mortal, a created being, a flawed human whose mind is tiny compared with God’s. Paul explains with wonder: *Rom 11:33 O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! Rom 11:34 For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Rom 11:35 Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? Rom 11:36 For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.*

That this giant of a God, in all respects, should make a man his friend, a sinful man at that, is beyond wonder. But it says He did and if I am not mistaken, we too are accounted as friends, *Joh 15:14 Ye are **my friends**, if ye do whatsoever I command you.*

We have a lot to live up to friends. Theophilus, friend of God, and that is where we go next.